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H. B. SMITH

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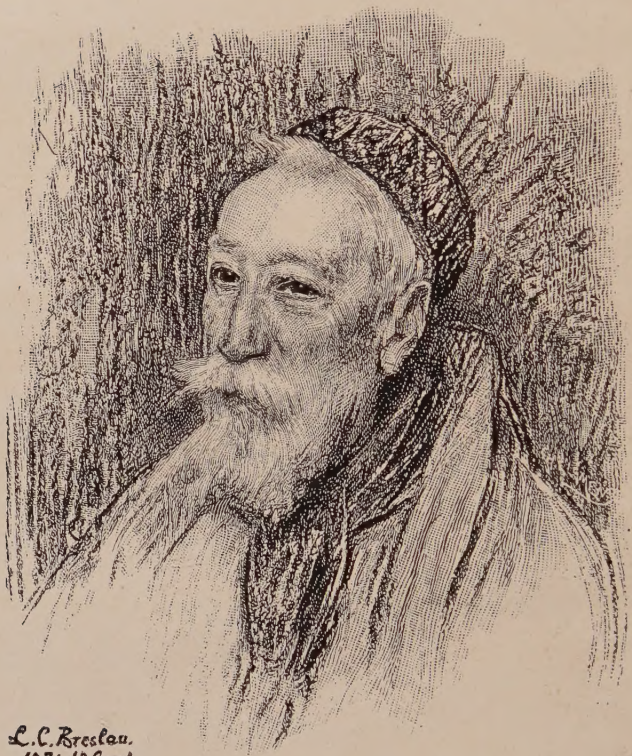

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THE SKEPTICISM OF ANATOLE FRANCE

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TO MY BROTHER and SISTER

This book is affectionately dedicated.

PREFACE

The author wishes to express her indebtedness to Professor Hugh Allison Smith and to Professor Frederic W. Giese of the University of Wisconsin for their help and cordial sympathy in the preparation of her doctor's thesis, from which this study has been taken. To Professor Albert Léon Guérard, who so helpfully read and reviewed the manuscript, grateful acknowledgment is made.

The author does not attempt to pronounce judgment nor to clarion in eulogy the great French writer. If she has helped to reveal the broad, intelligent tolerance, the hospitable, fearless, clear-seeing mind, the warm social sympathy of Anatole France, too much loved, too much hated, then, indeed, her task is done.

H. B. S.

September 9th, 1926.
Los Angeles, California.

INTRODUCTION

The critics almost unanimously adopt the term *skeptic* to describe, at least at some period or other, the personality and the philosophy of Anatole France. In 1888, Jules Lemaître, an author well qualified by his own temperament to understand France, wrote : " He is a Benedictiné with his tongue in his cheek ", as M. Hébrard has said ; " He is a tender skeptic " (1). Later, in 1898, he added : " *The Opinions of Jérôme Coignard* are surely the most radical breviary of skepticism which has appeared since Montaigne " (2). René Doumic, in an article appearing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* two years earlier, spoke of France's work as the " bible of modern incredulity " (3). According to him, Anatole France has made and maintained a wager to be a skeptic " without weakening ". Neither the shock of facts nor the urge of feeling has broken through his envelope of doubt. This was the France before the Dreyfus Affair.

A modern critic, Albert L. Guérard, has ably pictured the evolution of the author of *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* and *The Opinions.* " Our earliest conception of Anatole France is that of a singularly gentle spirit, full of curiosity as well as kindness ;

(1) *Revue Bleue,* 24 nov. 1888.
(2) *Les Contemporains,* vol. VI, p. 373.
(3) Doumic, *Études sur la littérature française,* p. 250.

free and open-minded as beseems a scholar and not afraid of adventurous speculation, but whose quaint paradoxes were deemed innocuous, so entirely did they seem divorced from real life, so conservative were the tastes and prejudices of the author. This is the pure and idyllic Anatole France of *The Book of My Friend* and *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* — a lover of children, priests and old scholars, himself a mixture of the scholar, the priest and the child ; a Renan expurgated for the use of orthodox families... But irony cannot long be kept within bounds : gradually, the gentle wit of Anatole France became more destructive " (1).

His humor played upon the eccentricities of man ; grew into pity and irony ; and in Jérôme Coignard, the pity, receding, surrendered to irony and amused contempt.

The Dreyfus Affair, however, showed that this attitude of contempt was rather a veil concealing real sympathy and a sensitive idealism. Confronted with this important social and moral problem, Anatole France cast aside his cloak of doubt to launch into the active struggle for the cause of right and justice. Under the influence of this crisis, he became a radical anticlerical. Indeed, he went further still. This man of aristocratic tastes and meditative spirit associated himself with the socialist movement, declining all offices but exerting his influence by speaking and writing. " He showed us ", wrote Gustave Lanson, " through his *Contemporary History* the positive elements in his skeptical and negative philosophy, the

(1) Guérard, *Five Masters of French Romance*, p. 44-45.

faith and power of action which his apparent dilettantism admitted and enjoined ; he revealed the fact that, like Montaigne, he had his dogmatism and practical energy " (1).

What, then, is the extent of the skepticism of Anatole France ? Is there not, from the first to the last of his works, an undercurrent of affirmation ? Has not his philosophy a positive element to which his skepticism naturally leads ? We shall attempt an answer in this study of his work.

Let us, first, examine what skepticism is and come to an understanding concerning the meaning of the term as applied to Anatole France. Mr. George Santayana, in his *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, analyzes skepticism as follows : " Scepticism is a suspicion of error about facts, and to suspect error about facts is to share the enterprise of knowledge in which facts are presupposed and error is possible. The sceptic thinks himself shrewd, and often is so ; his intellect, like the intellect he criticizes, may have some inkling of the true hang and connection of things ; he may have pierced to a truth of nature behind current illusions. Since his criticism may thus be truer and his doubt well grounded, they are certainly assertions which he is ready to maintain stoutly. Scepticism is accordingly a form of belief. Dogma cannot be abandoned ; it can only be revised in view of some more elementary dogma which it has not yet occurred to the sceptic to doubt ; and he may be right in every point of his criticism, except in fancying that his criticism is radical and that he is altogether a sceptic " (2).

(1) G. Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, p. 1119.
(2) Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, p. 8-9.

There is, then, no absolute skeptic. Timoclès de Cos, the dweller in the desert whom Paphnuce meets on his quest for Thaïs, is as much a skeptic as it is humanly possible to be. He believes that " it is indifferent whether we live or die... To act or abstain from action is equally vain... Things have diverse appearances and we know not even what we are... My opinion is to have no opinion " (1).

But Anatole France is no Timoclès de Cos, dwelling in the desert and sacrificing beauty, love and life itself for the sake of that untroubled calm, that " bienheureuse ataraxie " of which he so often speaks. That he has more than once glanced in the direction of absolute skepticism he frankly confesses but fear of the sterility of doubt has restrained him. The lips that have once pronounced the words " I doubt " are sealed forever and he had not the courage for such silence and renunciation (2).

Fortunat Strowski's definition of the skepticism of Montaigne seems rather fitly to apply to Anatole France as well. In Strowski's opinion there is a skepticism in the popular, as well as the philosophic, sense of the word. " The reader who judges Montaigne on the mixed impression which the reading of the *Essais* leaves with him calls him a skeptic in the popular sense of the word and the reader who judges him on the perusal of a single *Essai*, the twelfth, the *Apology of Raymond Sebond*, also calls him a skeptic but in the philosophic sense of the word. For the latter, Montaigne is a thinker studying the problem

(1) *Thaïs*, p. 28-36.
(2) France, *Vie littéraire*, vol. III, préface p. x-xi.

of certainty ; for the former, Montaigne is an epicurean who dozes off on the pillow of doubt " (1).

Such is the case for Anatole France. From the reading of his works in general is left the impression of skepticism in the popular sense of the word. From the perusal of definite parts, the reader concludes that he is a skeptic in the philosophic sense of the word. His is a mind unafraid of reality and curious of all things ; a mind keen to question and analyze, quick to see and reveal the weaknesses of human beings and organized society ; a mind which, unable to accept the supernatural and balked in its effort to pierce the mystery of life, concludes the uselessness of all metaphysics. At the same time this skeptic, for such we must call him, is capable of real assertions and throughout his works runs a strong current of affirmation.

To Anatole France the charge of skepticism, as he conceives it, is a term of highest praise. All the masters of French thought have been skeptics and he names Rabelais, Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire and Renan — " all the noblest spirits of our race, all those whom I venerate and of whom I am but the very humble scholar — Skepticism ! This word is made the synonym of negation and powerlessness. But our greatest skeptics were at times the most affirmative and courageous of men " (2). He speaks of the credo of these incredulous spirits — the majesty of tolerance in Rabelais, the pity, sacredness of friendship and tolerance of Montaigne, of Molière, " the fine evangel of sociability ", scoring the odious traits of character

(1) Strowski, *Montaigne*, p. 119-120.
(2) Gsell, *Matinées de la villa Saïd*, p. 81-83.

and the abuse of passion, of Voltaire, the ideal of reason, science and humanity, and lastly of Renan " who believed in the divine, in knowledge and in the future of men ". Anatole France is proud to belong to this company of great spirits as well as great minds.

Let us glance briefly at the life and family of Anatole France to see what influences developed the little Pierre into the Jérôme Coignard and Mr. Bergeret of later years.

Anatole France, or rather Anatole Thibault, was born in the heart of old Paris, at number 19 of the quai Malaquais (1). The influence of his surroundings, of the curio and antique shops was no doubt profound upon the dreamy boy. Many a time in his volumes of reminiscence he has evoked the image of the " Seine and its quais on those soft gray mornings which give to things an infinite sweetness " (2), " the *bouquinistes*, good venders of wit, who live ever outside, blown in the wind, so wrought by the air, the rains, the frosts, the snows, the fogs and the bright sun that they finally resemble the old statues of the cathedrals (3) ".

His father, François-Noël Thibault, called " le père France ", was of Anjou origin. He had been in the bookstore business since 1838 (4), six years previous to the birth of Anatole. He was somewhat of a man of letters himself, editing from 1840 to 1866 a number of works. His chief interest seemed to be the French Revolution, concerning which he was considered an

(1) G. Huard, *Anatole France et le quai Malaquais*, p. 6.
(2) France, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, p. 197.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 198.
(4) *A. France et le quai Malaquais*, p. 6.

authority. His bookstore was the gathering place for bibliophiles, collectors and lovers of the *ancien régime*. Little Anatole listened eagerly to the conversations which sometimes waxed warm about him and his child's memory was indelibly impressed.

His mother, Antoinette Galas, came from the cathedral town of Chartres. In the *Book of My Friend*, *Little Peter*, *Peter Nozière* and *Life in Bloom*, he sketches for us the picture of a beauty-loving, simple, timid and religious mother, endowed with an active imagination and a keenly sensitive love.

" My mother had a charming wit, a beautiful and generous soul and a character not easily satisfied. Too sensitive, too loving, too easily moved to find peace in herself, religion, she said, brought her a happy calm (1). "

Anatole France frequently mentions also his father and his grandmother *Nozière*.

" My father had a sublime conception of the human soul and its destiny ; he believed it made for heaven ; this faith rendered him optimistic. But in the ordinary business of life he was grave and sometimes somber. Like Lamartine, he laughed rarely, had no sense of the comic " (2), and was " enveloped in a sort of poetic melancholy ". He took pleasure, with the Romanticists, in the vague and indeterminate. (Anatole France preferred " elegant reason and the beautiful order of classic art. ")

" Grandma was frivolous ; Grandma's morals were indulgent ; Grandma had no more piety than a bird.

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(1) France, *Le petit Pierre*, p. 8.
(2) France, *Le petit Pierre*, p. 6-7.

What a round little eye she used to turn upon us, mother and me, when we left Sundays for church. She smiled at the seriousness with which my mother performed the business of this world and the other. She easily forgave me my faults and I believe she would have been capable of pardoning greater ones than mine " (1).

From this varied inheritance comes the complex character of the grown-up Pierre — his love of the simple and mysterious mingled with his ironical, irreverent boldness of thought.

In his books of reminiscence Anatole France has sketched with care and affection the quixotic imagination, the absorbing curiosity, the dreaminess and sensitive timidity of the boy. He has given a rather complete picture of the years spent at the Collège Stanislas. He was never a good student, too much inclined to dream and to absorb his thought in emotional evocations of the past, inspired by some lines from a Greek or Latin text.

Several of his professors he has cruelly and wittily described in *Little Peter* and *Life in Bloom*. One of them, M. Crottu, was " only a tissue of injustice. He wove iniquity as the spider weaves his web... I would not have retained my resentment for him, accustomed as I was from childhood to find men insulting and harsh. But I did not forgive him his inelegance. (How Anatolian !...) A thick leather covered his short fat hands which crushed all the delicate things on which they laid themselves and could give him the pleasure of no agreeable contact. His distrusting eyes did

(1) *Le Livre de mon Ami*, p. 82.

not know how to rest on lovely images. His face was drab ; the only expression of pleasure which he allowed to appear was lolling out of his mouth a moist tongue as he inscribed on a sordid register unjust punishments " (1).

Of himself as student France makes a rather accurate estimate. " I was as intelligent as most of my comrades but I was differently so. Their intelligence served them in the ordinary circumstances of life. Mine helped me only in the rarest and most unexpected occasions. It was manifested unexpectedly in far off promenades or in strange readings. I was resigned to not being a brilliant pupil and was prepared, from the time of my entrance into college, to seek what could give me amusement (divertissement) in my new existence. Such were my disposition and genius and I have never changed " (2).

The first real writing of Anatole France was verse, in which he shows distinctly the influence of Leconte de Lisle. From the age of twenty-three he frequented the group of Parnassians assembled at the editor's Lemerre and collaborated for certain bibliographical reviews. His early work consists of the *Légende de Sainte Radegonde*, " un devoir d'écolier " (1859), several biographical studies, beginning with one on Alfred de Vigny (1869) and finally a collection of poems, *Les Poèmes dorés*, dedicated to Leconte de Lisle and published in 1873. His talent was rather slow in forming. In 1876 he published *Les Noces corinthiennes*, considered generally to be his poetic masterpiece. Prose, however, now took the place of verse.

(1) France, *La Vie en Fleur*, p. 38.
(2) *Le petit Pierre*, p. 319.

In 1881 came the *Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* and with it fame. From then on, in unbroken succession appeared works of criticism, fairy tales, novels, short stories, a play or two, and even a history of Joan of Arc. His life was rather uneventful, a life of thought among books.

To follow the evolution of his thought is to behold a gradual disillusionment of spirit. The spectacle of life, youthful deceptions, and the fiasco of 1870, all helped to lay the foundation for it. Like Taine, Leconte de Lisle and Renan, whose influence can be seen in his work at times, Anatole France believed ardently in science and, like them, he, too, lost his ardor. Science was no longer the delphic oracle called upon to solve the problems of the universe ; to answer the yearning of the human soul, enveloped in its own mystery. A smiling indulgence, a calm disillusionment took the place of his parnassian confidence and dogmatism.

This is the period of such volumes as *Le Désir de Jean Servien, Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard, Le Livre de mon Ami, La Vie littéraire* and *Thaïs*. In *Thaïs* the indulgent irony and calm are already revealing a spirit of protest in the author. He is not merely the amused spectator of life. The controversy with Brunetière on the subject of the *Disciple* brings out certain fundamental beliefs of France. Above all he would insist on freedom of thought and tolerance. And yet he recognizes the dangers of thought as fully as Brunetière. " Let us recognize that the Idea alone has more than once armed the hand of a criminal " (1). While

(1) France, *Vie littéraire*, vol. III, p. 13.

admitting the danger of liberty, however, Anatole France feels that a restriction, a subordination, of thought would bring greater evil than would its freedom. It is not only a man's right but his duty to express his idea of truth, whatever that idea may be. For thought is the glory of man. " All our dignity consists in thought. Let us work, then, to think well " (1).

Thus he gives free rein to his intellectualism and we have the works called by some a hand-book of skepticism — the *Coignard* books, *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, *Le Lys rouge*, and *Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*. But even in these volumes of disillusionment can be traced certain elements of France's belief, — tolerance, sympathy, a bold and penetrating analysis of reality along with a protest against fanaticism, violence, complacent ignorance and prejudice. Beneath his intellectualism is throbbing a real sympathy for the victim of the intolerance and selfishness of human institutions. The Dreyfus Affair aroused in him an intensity of affirmation which surprised many. His anticlericalism became violent and his criticism of the powers of government engaged in the defense of a horrible injustice no longer knew the terms of calm tolerance. In socialism he felt a movement *toward* social justice and of opposition to the execrable system in existence.

In 1914, soon after the World War had broken out, he gave to the newspapers the following text : " We shall not soil our victory with any crime... We shall proclaim that the French people admits to its friend-

(1) France, *Vie littéraire*, vol. III, p. 69.

ship the vanquished enemy. " The universal war insanity of the moment caused him immediately to be overwhelmed with insults. In order to prove his undeniable and ardent love of country he volunteered for the army (1). This step was a profession of faith in his country, no more. War he continued as ardently as ever to detest. The four years of bitter struggle were a period of great anguish for him and he felt the suffering around him, though he was powerless to protest (2).

When the War came to an end in 1918, he returned to his early manner and published two charming volumes of reminiscence, *Le petit Pierre* and *La Vie en Fleur* (1918 and 1922 respectively). These were the last finished works to come from his pen. Illness brought to naught the many projects which he still had in mind to accomplish and of which only fragments remain, published in 1925 by Michel Corday. France's death, October 13th, 1924, brought to a close a long literary career. Few men have aroused such bitter discussion as he. To many he is the nihilist, agent of destruction and menace. To others he is the dilettante, the epicurean, the curious spectator of life, the great artist. To all, without exception, he represents in some degree or other " the skeptic ", a title which we shall now attempt to examine.

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(1) Corday, *Dernières pages inédites d'Anatole France*, p. 153-4.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 155-7.

CHAPTER ONE

Anatole France and his Skeptic Ancestors

Looking back upon the procession of the masters of French thought, Anatole France names five, to him " the greatest spirits of our race ", all skeptics, Rabelais, Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire and Renan. Of these he is the humble student, proud to be called a skeptic in such company. He claims, then, to be a skeptic in the fashion of Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire and Renan. Beneath their doubt lay affirmation, a credo of positive belief as well as of negation.

They all unite on the common ground of rationalism and in the affirmation of humanity and tolerance. Social criticism is another common denominator. And since " castigat mores ridendo ", here are the great " smiles " of their respective centuries. Rabelais and Molière laugh outright ; the former with the exuberance of physical life ; the latter with the sense of the ridiculous in life. Overflowing bibulous gaiety resounds in the work of Rabelais, concealing the more serious thought underneath. There is not with him as with Molière, the sense of tragedy close under the farce, of the tear moistening the retreating laugh. The exaggerated dimensions of Rabelais' fun and farce fit the gigantic and rather brutal figures of his heroes.

Molière also laughs abundantly but his farce is rather

the answer to the groundlings' demand or the humorous revelation of the inconsistencies and foibles of humanity. His greatest plays are those in which the ridiculous is almost overshadowed by the tragic. He approaches intimately human reality and immediately the laugh loses its detached gaiety. He sees the instrument of social torture in man's hypocrisy, avarice, selfishness and fanaticism. As Anatole France himself wrote in his criticism of Zola's *La Terre*, " misfortune alone would suffice to render man august to his brother man (1) ". We cease laughing at Harpagon in his very real grief, at Alceste in his poignant misanthropy.

In contrast with the laughter of Rabelais and Molière, is the smile of Montaigne, Voltaire, Renan and France. Montaigne has a gentle smile, rather detached and aristocratic ; Voltaire a mischievous grin, often a sardonic sneer. Renan and France partake of both the aristocratic amusement of Montaigne and the ironic mockery of Voltaire. There is, however, a romantic disillusionment about their smile which adds at times a more bitter, because more serious, twist to the lips.

It is perhaps curious that these great skeptics have been at the same time among the humorists of their centuries. Their intellectual inquiry has laid bare the reality, the skeleton of man, removing his sham covering. There is left but the choice to grieve or be amused, to pray or mock. Pascal and the saints choose the former ; they possess faith. Anatole France and his skeptic ancestry prefer to be amused ; they must doubt.

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(1) France, *Vie littéraire*, vol. I, p. 236.

Examining now the kinship of France with his skeptic forbears, we first take up Rabelais. In the genius of Rabelais France takes great pleasure. He calls himself a philosopher monk, belonging in his heart to the abbey of Thélème where tolerance, indulgence and respect of the individual are the virtues worshipped (1). Several of France's short stories are modeled directly on Rabelais written in the archaic language of his time. The comedy *Celui qui épousa une femme muette*, owes its inspiration to Rabelais also. In the *Vie littéraire* (2), France devotes an article to him, admiring in him, above all, " a great breath of humanity, of benevolence and kindness ". " Fanaticism and violence were held in horror by his laughing, free and broad nature. "

In common both men possessed the spirit of humanism, breadth and freedom of thought and the protest against dogmatism. The coarseness, however, and the unrefined buffoonery of medieval thought produced but a pale echo in France, even in such stories as those of the joyous Buffalmacco in *Saint Clara's Well*. Anatole France was the aristocrat, the artist, in contrast with Rabelais, the exuberant, hearty man of the people.

Far more akin by nature and thought are Montaigne and Anatole France. Both suspended judgment on many things, at the same time affirming others with vehemence. This suspension of judgment in both was generally on metaphysical subjects, on that over which reason had no power. Both seemed convinced

(1) France, *Vie littéraire*, vol. I, préface, p. III.
(2) *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 31.

of the feebleness of human reason but at the same time lauded it as the chief glory of man, the only hope toward a solution of his problems. Both had a universal curiosity, a love of intellectual adventure and speculation, as seen in their review of the various philosophies developed from the time of the Greeks to their day. It is because of these traits, which had engendered, through experience, a philosophical disillusionment in both, because of the uncertainty of men's judgment, that both clung so strongly to the ideal of tolerance. What conviction it would take to roast a man at the stake ! said Montaigne.

Besides the intellectual kinship there is that of character. Both writers were fond of meditation, of tranquil retirement but neither, when called upon to play his part, refused to bear his burden of responsibility. Montaigne accepted his unsought position as mayor of Bordeaux and acquitted himself of his duties creditably. Anatole France took part in the Dreyfus struggle, became a socialist and finally, when the World War broke out, though he had expressed countless times his horror of war, offered to enroll as a private soldier in defense of his country. The picture of the true France, however, is that of the gentle, book-loving Sylvestre Bonnard philosophizing in the calm of the City of Books and Montaigne is most frequently imagined absorbed in the contemplation of his favorite volumes and inscriptions.

Both men are fond ol talking of themselves, though with a slight difference in motive. Montaigne, at least, at one phase of his life, took himself as a convenient and available example for his study of man, the universal. Anatole France, on the other hand, used

himself because he believed no one capable of getting beyond his own personality, that when we criticize, we are giving our own impressions, that when we read, we are reconstructing the work of the author by the interpretation of our own personality.

Anatole France and Montaigne resemble each other in their sensitiveness, a sensitiveness to suffering of all kinds. It was this which, in addition to his feeling of thē uncertainty of human judgments, inclined Montaigne to tolerance and inspired him to protest against torture and unjust punishment. In Anatole France this sensitiveness is even more developed. It is expressed not only toward suffering but also toward beauty and resulted in his hatred of all that deformed, altered or repressed beauty. Beauty for him was a veritable cult, and the desire for it the ruling passion of his life. In Montaigne, on the other hand, we feel a greater preoccupation with the truth, with duty and noble example. He passed through a period of stoic exaltation. His imagination was fired with the high courage of a Cato. That this was only a phase of his development, that Montaigne afterward returned to an epicureanism more true to his easy nature must not be forgotten. It was this fundamental epicurean in him that appealed to Anatole France. He felt little attraction for stoic calm and indifference. Epicureanism was the artist way of living, moderation, living according to one's nature, enjoying the beautiful and good. Anatole France was above all the artist ; hence his worship of beauty, his attention to form, his sensitiveness to rythm, music and the poetic revelations of the past. Montaigne cannot be called an artist in the same sense.

Another difference between the two men is due to the 18th century elements which Anatole France possessed. It is the utter lack of reverence for tradition, morality, and religion which we feel in France. It is true that Montaigne also was an unbeliever, that he criticized the arguments for religion and adopted the theory of grace more as a concession to orthodoxy than as a conviction of his own. Nevertheless he did not write a *Révolte des Anges*, a *Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*, nor even a *Thaïs*. Nor was it simply because he, like Rabelais, would defend his ideas as far as the stake exclusively. Montaigne felt the seriousness of the problem and criticized the abuses perpetrated in the name of religion. He did not mock religion itself. In Anatole France there is a flaunting of incredulity, a mocking of faith which grow until, in *La Révolte des Anges*, it is a magnificiently oratorical blasphemy. Between Anatole France and Montaigne lie Voltaire and Renan.

In contrast with this decided difference in tone between Anatole France and Montaigne, there is an interesting similarity in form, not the exterior form of essay, novel and short story but rather the inner form of expression. Both writers have the genius of conversation. They are brilliant " causeurs ". Their books are the chattings of the authors with themselves and the reader. The monologues of the one and the dialogues of the other are essentially the conversing, as Renan puts it, of the different lobes of the authors' brains. Montaigne's literary effort took the form of " essais ", the history of his ideas noted from day to day. With the coming of new ideas, he merely enlarged his chapters or added others, paying no heed to the

contradictions among them. Anatole France's writing, though embracing the varied forms of poetry, novels, history, criticism and short story, is really conversational, a series of talks with a skeleton frame of plot to clothe with his reveries and with characters to speak his thoughts.

So much, then, for the similarities and differences of Montaigne and Anatole France beyond the inner circles of their thought. The common ground where both circles coincide is tolerance. In both it has much the same foundation, the horror of suffering and injustice and the necessity to suspend judgment because of the uncertainty of knowledge. Montaigne, in the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, sets out to defend the man who attempts to support religion on a purely rational basis. In reality Montaigne does just the opposite thing. Reason on which man prides himself so highly and founds his superiority over the animals is of little or no value. In intelligence the animals are the equals of man. They communicate among themselves; they show judgment. Montaigne supports his argument with many examples, — the power of organization of the bees, the cleverness of the elephants. In fact, animals have a certain superiority over man who is born a helpless infant and must go through a long period of training to attain an independence reached by animals in a few short weeks or months. It is true that man boasts a freedom of imagination and of thought seemingly lacking in the lower animals but, protests Montaigne, even though this be true, it is an advantage dearly paid for by man and scarcely one of which to boast. This very freedom of imagination and thought is " the principal source of the evils which

overwhelm him : sin, sickness, indecision, confusion of mind and soul despair " (1).

It is against man's pride that Montaigne is arguing, against his presumption in making himself the center of the universe. Man should recognize his littleness, his limitations. Does he, asks Montaigne, solve the problems of life with his reason ? After an earnest and sincere examination, the man of thought is forced to conclude that after all the centuries of search and research, he has learned only to recognize his own powerlessness. There is found nothing of real solidity and firmness unless it be man's vanity. Man's acquaintance with the world comes through his senses but by them he is deceived. Some men see one thing ; others see the same object differently. Man cannot rely on the evidence of his senses. Truth should have a " like and universal visage " throughout the world.

But what is truth ? Montaigne observes that the customs upheld in one country are scorned in another. There is a multiplicity of codes of justice, of moral traditions of religions and philosophies. Here is the declaration of the relativity of things and of the uncertainty of knowledge found in Anatole France. " Is it not better ", writes Montaigne, " to remain in suspense than to embarass oneself in so many errors, product of human imagination ? Is it not preferable to reserve one's conviction than to mingle in these seditious and quarrelsome disputes ? " (2)

Montaigne and Anatole France discuss miracles, education and government. Concerning miracles, Mon-

(1) MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, vol. II, p. 151.
(2) *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 233.

taigne takes a common-sense point of view. Such phenomena are the product of the imagination of the credulous, the visionary. Anatole France, on the other hand, does not deny miracles but believes it impossible to establish the fact of a supernatura happening. Man's explorations will never reach beyond the bounds of nature ; thus he can never establish the fact of a miracle.

In their ideas of the education of the individual, Montaigne and France coincide in general. Both emphasize the awakening of the curiosity, the development of judgment. Both scorn pedantry and protest against cramming the student's head with facts. Anatole France is interested, however, in the education not only of the individual but of the people as a whole. On the people depends the form of government of a nation. An intelligent, educated people will demand a liberal government. Naturally he is especially interested in the education of the working classes in whose hands he conceived the future to lie in great part.

Both tranquil intellectuals, so far apart in time and living under such diverse regimes, coincide rather strangely at times in the expression of their ideas of government. To a certain degree they are both pessimists, conscious of the hold of tradition, of custom and habit, and doubtful whether the advantage gained by modifying a law, once an integral part of society, outweighs the evils engendered by the change. Both fear the violence of the new ; the old has at least the merit of tolerance. Anatole France, however, is fearless in brushing away the cobwebs of prejudice. The fear of change does not prevent him from giving an extra

impulse to the broom when sweeping out hidden corners of abuse and inconsistency in the social edifice.

In his role of iconoclast and satirist, however, Anatole France resembles less Montaigne than Voltaire and Molière. With Molière he has in common the Gallic salt, the fearless and pessimistic facing of reality and the belief in nature and freedom as opposed to coercion and repression. France's characterizations of the intelligent, pleasure-loving, unreverent Jérôme Coignard, of the smooth priest, Guitrel, the fanatic monk, Paphnuce, the ignorant social victim, Crainquebille, the arbitrary judge, Bourriche, the so-called patriotic nobleman, M. Panneton de la Barge and others are mere sketches and cannot be compared to the characterizations of Molière. France was interested in them as the expression of his criticism of social institutions and customs rather than as a portrayal of universal human character. His relationship with Molière is, after all, rather distant, that of a second cousin, perhaps, while of Voltaire he is a veritable grandson.

France's enthusiam for the 18th century, which he calls " the boldest, the most likeable, the greatest " is an echo of Voltaire's " oh, this age of iron, how good it is ! " In spirit they are both epicureans insisting that life is a thing to enjoy and the present world the one in which to enjoy it. Interested in their fellow-men, they went even farther and rebuked the abuses by which the world denied to many their right to happiness.

To both, religion was a source of fanatic intolerance and cruelty. Voltaire was anticlerical in the name of

reason and tolerance. He had seen superstition and prejudice cause bitter injustice in the cases of the Calas, Sirven and La Barre families. Anatole France, too, took arms against the Church but not only on rational grounds. To him the Church was the enemy of beauty ; it scorned art, love and poetry. Christianity was " the misunderstanding which, for eighteen centuries, has estranged humanity from nature (1) "

Thaïs is an exemple of France's early anticlericalism as well as of his voltairian spirit. *Thaïs* is the *Candide* of Anatole France. As *Candide* proves the reverse of the Leibnitzian theory, so *Thaïs* proves the reverse of the teachings of the Church. In the one, conclusive demonstration is made that everything is not for the best in this far from best of worlds ; in the other it is asceticism and violence which meet defeat. Though lacking the subtitle such as Voltaire gave his philosophic tale, *ou l'optimisme*, *Thaïs* might well be given one such as *ou l'ascétisme.* The philosophic refrain, " all is for the best in this best of worlds " which sings ironically through *Candide* has no counterpart nor can one be supplied directly from the text of *Thaïs.* Such a refrain would be too lacking in subtlety for Anatole France. His tale is an apparently orthodox one, couched in the language of the saints, bespeaking the power of grace over the lust of the flesh. But beneath the expressions from the Lives of the Saints lies the mockery of the unbeliever. Through the tale of the redemption of the courtesan appears the ironic damnation of the ascetic, fanatic monk. Upon Paphnuce, the violent man of

(1) France, *L'Histoire comique*, p. 7.

God, nature and Anatole France wreak vengeance.

Thaïs is thus a philosphic tale in its general spirit but in the characterization, description and subtlety of style the likeness of the two works ceases. Voltaire, the irreverent, malicious *gavroche* is more frank, more brutal in his attitude ; France, the meditative savant, surrounded with treasures of ecclesiastical art and books, retains outwardly the almost priestly calm and elegance with which he subtly disguises a bitter denunciation of asceticism. *Thaïs* is tempered with the romantic artistry of a Renan. *Penguin Island*, on the other hand, gives an excellent example of France's voltairianism in full movement.

The beginning of *Penguin Island* with the voyage of Saint Maël in the miraculous vessel of stone is slightly reminiscent of Voltaire's *Ingénu.* The part, however, which is particularly voltairian in character is the " Assembly in Paradise ".

" Being a Christian ", said Saint Corneille, " is not without its grave difficulties for a penguin. These birds are now obliged to work their salvation. How can they succeed ? The customs of birds are in many respects contrary to the commands of the Church. And the penguins have no reason to change them. I mean they are not reasonable enough to take up better ones.

" They cannot, " said the Lord. " My decrees prevent them. "

" Still ", continued Saint Corneille, " by virtue of their baptism, their actions cease to remain indifferent. Henceforth they will be good or evil, susceptible of merit or blame. "

" That is the matter exactly ", said the Lord.

" I see only one solution to it, " said Saint Augustine. " The penguins will go to Hell. "

" But they have no soul ", observed Saint Irenée.

" That's unfortunate ", sighed Tertullian (1).

The subtlety, the hidden mockery has vanished. Voltaire himself would not have disavowed the passage.

At the Sign of Queen Pédauque, a tale of the 18th century, presents a strong voltairian element in its chief character, the pleasure-loving, wine-bibbing, indulgent priest, Jérôme Coignard. The devil is surely a great logician and he speaks from the mouth of Coignard, " mischievously naïve " indeed. Coignard admires the Christian religion for founding salvation on repentence. The greater the fault, the greater the repentence, therefore the greater the saint. Thus " the essentials of sanctity are lust, incontinence, all the impurities of flesh and mind. The important thing after having amassed these essentials is to work them according to theological art and to model them, so to speak, into the form of penitence, which is a matter of several years, of several days and at times of a single instant, as is seen in the case of perfect contrition " (2). Surely Voltaire wrote nothing more diabolically ironical than this.

Anticlericalism unites the two skeptics. " Écrasez l'infâme " — ignorance, superstition, fanaticism in the name of religion — such was the cry of Voltaire. Anatole France went even farther. To him Christianity was a source of more evil than good. Its God, Iaveh, whom he pictures in various works from

(1) France, *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 34.
(2) France, *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*, p. 157-158.

Thaïs to *The Revolt* is an utter tyrant. " He looked upon suffering and death as the happy effects of his almightiness and sovereign kindness. And the blood of the victims steamed toward him as agreeable incense. He condemned intelligence and hated curiosity... He took pleasure in mystery and, believing himself diminished if understood, he affected to be unintelligible. A dense theology befogged his brain " (1).

Not only in their anticlericalism did Anatole France and Voltaire coincide but also in their satire on human institutions and human frailties. Voltaire, on account of the censorship of his time, was obliged to conceal or mask his attacks in philosophical tales, the heroes and heroines of which were puppets whom he conducted through the various parts of the earth and the other planets. In *Candide* he pictures a sketchy and fanciful utopia, *El Dorado* which it is interesting to examine in connection with France's utopia. Voltaire's caricature is ironical. It is a criticism of certain existing conditions, not a dream of the future as France's utopia is, to a certain degree, to him.

Voltaire's country is a beautiful country, cultivated for pleasure as well as for utility. The children, whom the travelers behold, are dressed in gold brocade and play in the streets with precious stones. The very inversion of values is ironical. The satire continues. In the first place the country has no priests ; there they are all priests and their religion is to adore God from morning to night. They do not pray but render thanks to the Creator who has given them all they need. The country has no courts, no parliament, no

(1) France, *La Révolte des Anges*, p. 408.

prisons, but Voltaire does not explain further his ideal. Perhaps the keenest irony of all is in the passage satirizing the restless ambition of humankind. Candide who, after grievous trials, has reached this blessed land, is not content to remain. " If we remain here ", he observes, " we shall be only like the others, whereas if we return home with but twelve sheep loaded with the pebbles of El Dorado, we shall be richer than the sum of all the kings (1) ". He departs with his treasure and is shipwrecked !

Anatole France is apparently rather serious in his utopia which is a somewhat commonplace picture of a socialistic future, no private property, no marriage, no law, no courts, no theology, money replaced by bonds representing hours of work, religions still in existence, work for everybody, above all no repression and thus diminished suffering. The social satire which may, however, be compared with Voltaire's is not to be found in his utopia but in his *Crainquebille*, the Coignard books and the *Contemporary History*. Each in turn, war, government, religion and justice come under the keen scrutiny of both men.

Crainquebille is a voltairian arraignment of the stupidity, vanity and injustice of the courts. Through Jérôme Coignard France echoes Voltaire's hatred of war. It is Voltaire who wrote : " Philosophers, moralists, burn all your books. As long as the caprice of a few men will cause thousands of our brothers to be patriotically murdered, so long will the part of humanity devoted to heroism be the most frightful thing in all nature " (2). Coignard, too, has his indignant

(1) Voltaire, *Romans* (édition Larousse), II, p. 57.
(2) Voltaire, *Œuvres*, vol. XIX, p. 320-321.

protest. " If there be an honor among peoples, it is, indeed, a strange way to sustain it to wage war, that is, to commit all the crimes by which a private citizen dishonors himself — incendiarism, rapine, theft, murder " (1).

Somewhere Voltaire speaks of the " excess of the absurd insolence of those who govern the people and the excess of the imbecility of the governed. " The *Contemporary History* of Anatole France gives a close echo to this pessimism and *Penguin Island* itself is a scathing satire on the origins of society.

Anatole France and Voltaire coincide not only in their pessimism, in their critical and fearless review of society but also in their method of attack, i. e. in their irony. The pessimism of France may be of blacker hue than Voltaire's, due to the romantic disillusionment and the war of 1870. The irony of the two writers is similar in expression. " The world without irony ", wrote Anatole France, " would be a forest without birds ; irony is the gaiety of reflexion and the joy of wisdom (2) ". For him irony and pity are the two counselors of life. Irony teaches one to laugh at the wicked and foolish in order to avoid the weakness of hating them. In his early works France's irony remains like " the singing of birds, " if we may borrow his expression, but later on, deepening bitterness sharpens the weapon to a murderous point.

What, now, are some of the devices common to both authors and wherein do they differ ? In general Voltaire is more concise and less subtle. He reduces the

(1) France, *L'Orme du Mail*, p. 282-283.
(2) France, *Vie littéraire*, III, p. 32.

incidents of a story to the most significant details, laying aside all passion and poetry, expressing himself intellectually. France, on the contrary, paints a full picture and develops the idea along with the atmosphere and realism of the tale.

Voltaire plays with names such as Dr. Akakia, Mr. Clacpitre, the baron Thunder-ten-tronckh. In France there are a few examples such as M. Panneton de la Barge and President Bourriche. Both use recurring phrases, the repetition of which produces the ironical effect.

Voltaire represents a situation by one chosen circumstance, suppressing all else. Zadig exclaims : " I have been condemned to a fine for having seen a dog pass ; I was almost impaled for the sake of a griffin ; I have been sent to the scaffold because I composed verse in praise of the king ; I have been on the point of being strangled because the queen had yellow ribbons and here I am a slave with you because a brutal fellow beat his mistress " (1). Another trick of Voltaire's is to join together two unrelated and unexpected things. It is the reductio ad absurdum. " It is proven that things cannot be otherwise ; for since all is made for an end all is necessarily for the best end. Notice that noses were made to wear glasses ; so we have glasses " (2).

Another favorite method of Voltaire's is the mask of naïveté. " At last having examined the strong and the weak points of the sciences it was decided that the marquis would learn to dance (3). " It is a favorite

(1) Voltaire, *Romans* (édition Larousse), I, p. 80.
(2) Voltaire, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 6.
(3) *Ibid.*, II, p. 119.

with Anatole France also who uses to bring out the absurdity of a situation the self-evident discrepancy between it and truth. " What the public interest demands, what it exacts, is that, of those who possess much, little be asked ; for then the rich would be less rich and the poor poorer. The poor live on the wealth of the rich ; that is why this weatlh is sacred (1). "

Anatole France is fond of remarking ironically upon the connection between his characters' point of view and the situation. Thus M. Bergeret after his wife's deception views the world as Zadig did after his disillusionment. " Then he imagined men such as they are in fact., insects devouring one another on an atom of mud (2). " After his appointment to Paris, Bergeret's attitude is reversed. These inconsistencies are a source of ironical joy in both authors. Zadig's wife comes home scolding the infidelity of a friend. Putting her to the test, Zadig finds her of the same timber. One of the best scenes in the *Contemporary History* is the interview of M. Panneton de la Barge who, gloating over the military glory of the army and his family's military record, asks M. Bergeret's advice as to what subjects his son Adhémar could study in order to obtain the one year exemption. M. Bergeret suggests the " tamoul, le malgache " as a language and finally mentions a Polynesian language " which was no longer spoken at the beginning of this century except by an old woman of the yellow race. This woman died, leaving a parrot. A German savant collected a few words of this language from the beak

(1) France, *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 67.
(2) Voltaire, *Romans*, vol. I, p. 77.

of the parrot. He made a lexicon of it. Perhaps this lexicon is taught at the College of Oriental Languages. I earnestly counsel your son to find out (1). "

An example of France's ironical portraiture is the following. " M. Lerond had at last found a subject for surprise and emotion, for meditation and moral pleasure, a wall. His judicial soul, blasted in its bloom at the same time as his fortune..., his heart deprived too soon of the joy of punishing, jubilated at sight of a wall, of the deaf, dumb and somber thing which recalled to his ravished thought the ideas of prison, of dungeon, of sentences endured, of social vengeance, of code, law, justice, of morality, a wall " (2). Many other examples of the irony of the two authors might be given but these are sufficient to show the close relationship.

In thought and expression Voltaire and Anatole France often meet. Theirs is a rational criticism of society, an appeal for tolerance and justice, an irreverence for things sacred, a hatred of ignorance and superstition, all expressed at times with gentle mockery, at times with biting irony. Voltaire is rather epigrammatic ; France longer and more elaborate in style. His descriptions have a romantic artistry about them lacking in Voltaire's philosopher-framed world. The famous passage from *Thaïs* on the pyramids of Memphis exemplifies an essential difference between Voltaire and France, a difference by which the latter is most closely related to Ernest Renan.

Renan is the last of the skeptics whose memory

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(1) France, *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 73.
(2) France, *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, p. 78-79.

France evokes. In addition to the dry, sparkling irony of Voltaire (for Renan, too, has a voltairian phase) there is in him a priestly seriousness and idealism, the breton mystic and dreamer joined to the mocking gascon. Educated by the priests for the life of the Church, he lost his faith only after a bitter struggle. In *Memories of Childhood and Youth*, he still could write : " I feel that my life is still governed by a faith which I no longer possess (1). " Renan's ardent aspiration to a life of service above the prosaic and often sordid reality of human life, his need for an authority of some sort to settle the problems of the universe, an authority he sought in science when denied it in religion, his solemn search for truth, all these we do not find in Anatole France. On the other hand, Renan's worship of the beautiful, his sensitiveness and power of comprehension, his later disillusionment are clearly reflected in the character and writing of France. They have in common more than a mutual voltairianism.

Above all, both skeptics are characterized by complexity and finesse of intellect joined to an artistic sensibility. From such a compound arise the contradictions and paradoxes common to both. The heart and intellect travel parallel roads which never join. In Renan this divided allegiance produces a painful struggle. Anatole France, however, finds no need in himself to make a choice. He constructs no philosophy and truth to him is not an absolute but a relative thing. What one cannot believe one can enjoy through the understanding.

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(1) RENAN, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, p. 12.

To understand rather than to conclude became for Renan also an increasing need. In later life a favorite trick of his was to qualify all with a " perhaps " or a question mark. His sensibility, his youth " nourished with sacred images and great dreams " gave him the power to evoke religious images of the past. But his pictures are emotional sketches with little attention to outer detail ; his characters are often the echo of his own personality, containing the shadings of his feelings. History to him was the evocation of the past through the understanding, not the mere commenting of original sources and texts. Philosophy, he believed, depended on the individuality of the thinker, each system being true in the brain of its author.

Such subjectivity is even more constant in Anatole France. It is the foundation of his skepticism. Objective criticism does not exist because of the human incapacity to get outside oneself. History is not a science but an art dependent on the historian's judgment, taste and imagination. Science is forever veiled by the inevitable intervention of the human apperception. The " eye armed with the microscope is none the less a human eye (1) ". The scientist can obtain a knowledge of certain natural phenomena but he cannot penetrate the why of their being.

The wall against which Anatole France pictured the savant striking in the dark did not, however, prevent him from continuing his intellectual gyrations. Both he and Renan were fascinated by the unknown, the mysterious. Renan, the dilettante, Renan of the *Philosophical Dialogues*, never tired of plunging his

(1) France, *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, p. 53.

glance into the mystery of the universe. His last attempts were, however, more in the nature of vengeful thrusts or fantastic reveries. From his idealistic heights he fell to depths of disillusionment. Men are the dupes of nature. They place their nobility in the obstinate affirmation of duty but there is a good chance that the opposite be true. Though holding himself to a high standard, Renan, the dilettante, counseled pleasure to others. In his emphasis on voluptuousness Anatole France is an over-developed godson of the broken idealist.

Renan's *Philosophical Dialogues* are a form of amusement which he offered his brain, " burned by reasoning ". In it we find a conception of the universe which has elements of a nightmare. An oligarchy rules, possessing science, by the power of which it is able to annihilate the planet. This " reign of terror " it uses to serve truth. The god formed from this vision of the universe is a single organized being, the infinity of which sums up the billions and trillions of lives past and present altogether, " a single being concentrating in itself all the enjoyment of the universe (1) ".

France's *Revolt of the Angels*, a renanian fantasy, presents his conception of Satan, of the individualist in revolt. Renan's monstruous god in whose being humanity is engulfed has no attractions for France. His sympathy is lavished on Satan, the dispossessed prince of intelligence and benevolence. It is Satan who comes to understand man through suffering and rises to comfort him. Iaveh, on the other hand, is the tyrant, the oppressor, scorning beauty, denying

(1) Renan, *Dialogues philosophiques*, p. 128.

freedom. Here again Renan and France unite in their worship of beauty and protest against asceticism.

In the *Prayer on the Acropolis* Renan expressed his admiration for Greek thought and art. The revelation of this pagan beauty and worship was to him the revelation of " the Greek miracle " which suddenly overshadowed " the Jewish miracle " in the worship of which he had been reared. A morality founded on aesthetics took the place of his religious faith. But when his enthusiastic idealism no longer inspired him, Renan became obsessed by the thought of woman, of physical beauty and the enjoyment of the senses.

This worship of beauty in exterior form we find constant in Anatole France. His heroines are not only beautiful but worship their own pulchritude. Moreover they are generally ignorant, often superstitious and always creatures of instinct. The yielding to instinct which so unpleasantly marks Renan's *Philosophical Dramas* finds a strong reverberation in the work of his disciple. It is the sensuous element which becomes a veritable disease in much of the work of France. It is the result of over-intellectualism, for which Renan offers an explanation in his *Memories*: " We are almost all dual in nature. The more man develops himself intellectually, the more does he dream of the opposite pole ; i. e. the irrational, repose in complete ignorance, the woman who is woman only, the instinctive being which acts only through the impulse of an obscure conscience (1). "

An over developed, over indulged curiosity, seconded by an intelligence so keen as to remain unsatisfied

(1) Renan, *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*, préface, p. vii-viii.

with the meager results obtained toward the solution of life's mystery, and in addition a strong tendency to rely on feeling as a guide — such is the cause of Renan's disillusionment. His creed was " the cult of the ideal, the negation of the supernatural, the experimental search for truth. " But he never analyzed and established firmly his basic idea that humanity is aspiring and working to a higher good. It was a matter of feeling with this idealistic Celt and his experience of life seemed to negative it. At the end of his life he wrote : " More and more I believe that we know very little of what we would most like to know... Let us know how to wait ; there is perhaps nothing at the end ; or else who knows but that the truth is sad. Let us not be so hurried to discover it (1). " This is the teaching which Anatole France took most to heart. Throughout his work is felt the futility of the search ; the melancholy of the walled-in prisoner athirst for liberty.

From the parallels here drawn between the thought of Anatole France and his skeptic ancestors, it is evident that certain elements are common to all. The intellectual foundation for each is rationalism, the central theme, tolerance and humanity. All unite in doubt of metaphysics and center their criticism on the weakness of man and the injustice of human institutions. To all, excepting perhaps Voltaire, life presents an absorbing problem of uncertainty. Curious as they are of all forms of life, ideas and facts, there is an element of the dilettante in their work, and yet, the one who seems least dilettante of them all,

(1) Renan, *Feuilles détachées*, préface, p. ix.

Voltaire, is the one in whom most often is lacking the proud seriousness of speculation. The feeling of melancholy disillusionment, heritage of the French revolution, of the romantic excesses, of the over-confidence in science and of the war of 1870 lies heavily upon Renan and France. Different and yet similar they all unite in the movement toward enlightened tolerance. The " que sais-je " of Montaigne and the " écrasez l'infâme " of Voltaire are complements of each other in the battle against prejudice. We do not know the truth sufficiently to burn a man at the stake for views contrary to those commonly accepted. Consequently in our ignorance, it is humanity and a constant striving toward intellectual enlightenment which form the affirmative duty of the aristocrat of the mind. To the credo of Montaigne and Voltaire has been added the cult of beauty by Renan. Heir of them all, Anatole France unites in his person the intellectual, the humanitarian and the artist.

CHAPTER TWO

The Early Period of France's Skepticism

The first work of importance in a study of Anatole France's thought is his poetic masterpiece, *Les Noces corinthiennes*, published in 1876. It is the story of the bride of Corinth and presents the contrast of early Christianity with paganism, a contrast of which France is extremely fond. Hippias, the hero, denied his bride by a mother's vow to Christ, protests against such unjust sacrifice. " I know thee at last, Spirit swelled with envy, Specter who comest troubling the feast of life, Evil Demon, armed against the human race (1). "

Love and beauty on the one side ; a fanatic vow and asceticism on the other ; such is the struggle and its termination — tragedy. To France the worship of beauty is as sacred as it was to the long dead pagan of Greece. Christianity is a force of repression, deforming nature, an asceticism scorning beauty, art and love. The protest of Hippias is his protest, that of the poet, the artist, the lover. With time his attitude becomes more hostile, for it is later to add to itself the protest of France, the humanitarian, and of France, the anticlerical.

In spite of this hostile attitude, there is much in religion which France loves. For the naïveté, humi-

(1) Poésies (*Les Noces corinthiennes*), p. 192.

lity and sweetness of the Christian religion, Anatole France had much sympathy. The Saint Francis character charmed him. The legends contained an earnest faith, a simple sentiment, unspoiled by fanaticism. At times they had the shiver of superstition, the charm of the mysterious. Besides they breathed the odor of antiquity and were often very close to paganism.

Two stories of this nature are *Amycus et Celestin* (1) and *Saint Satyre* (2) from the collections entitled *L'Étui de nacre* and *le Puits de Sainte Claire*. *Amycus and Celestin* is the story of a hermit celebrating the Easter rites in company with Amycus, the satyr, spirit of nature and the woods. The hermit celebrates the Christian rites to the glory of the Creator while Amycus in reverence adores the sun, for him the creator of the life of the spring woods. The hermit never succeeds in making the satyr understand the mysteries of his worship but the latter constantly adores in his own way and brings garlands to the altar. Together they worship and the priest says, "The faun is the hymn of God". One might read from this story the thought that the object of all worship is the Creator, though he be visualized differently according to the knowledge of those worshipping. The adoration of the faun, too, was good, for, though pagan, it added beauty and fragrance to the altar of God.

The second story, *Saint Satyre*, relates how the secrets of the nymphs and satyrs are revealed to the monk

(1) *L'Étui de nacre*, p. 31-39.
(2) *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*, p. 14-48.

Mino and how on his betrayal of them to his religion, the nymphs punish him by death. Satyr and his friends were born of earth long before the human race. Saturn is replaced as God by Jupiter and Jupiter, by the Galilean. Feeling it natural that one god should succeed another, Satyr helps the messengers of the Galilean, among whom he is honored and loved. On his death he is made a saint and to his tomb the mothers bring their children, that they may become strong and brave. Gradually, however, the apostles come from the Orient to drive out the nymphs from the forests and caves. Only Saint Satyr's tomb is left them as refuge and this last asylum is betrayed by Fra Mino who pays for his treachery with his life. Here again the intolerance of Christianity is contrasted with the tolerance and joy of pagan nature. The feeling of France's lingering regret for the loss of the latter is as evident as his protest against the intolerance of the former.

The next works of this early period, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* and *Le Livre de mon Ami*, reveal an indulgent emotional disillusionment. The old scholar reflects (1) that men are eternal children pursuing ever new playthings ; that the Horatian philosophy may be right and human beings created rather to " eat ice cream " than to pore over old texts. But after all the noblest souls are tortured with a sublime discontent, ever seeking farther, though the quest may be in vain. Beauty will endure even in the universal death when the earth like the moon will roll on in space her pale cadaver. Though he himself should outlive old friends and family, he need have no fear, for as

(1) *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, p. 34, 49, 140.

long as men exist, some there will be that one can love.

The gentle disillusionment of Sylvestre Bonnard, sustained by warm emotion, gradually loses in succeeding volumes its soft outlines, its poetic atmosphere. The novel, *Thaïs*, written ten years after the *Crime*, displays a more profound skepticism. Moreover it seems to embody the varied elements, complex and apparently contradictory, of France's philosophy. We find in it his intellectual curiosity accompanied by suspended judgment, his voluptuousness accompanied by anticlericalism, the whole expressed with his favorite compound of irony and seeming simplicity. For the study of France's skepticism *Thaïs* is an important volume.

The period described in the story is for Anatole France a favorite one — the early Christian era. It recalls his poetic work, *Les Noces corinthiennes*. Hippias, there cheated of his bride, is here avenged by the damnation of the ascetic monk. What Hippias loved and could not possess because of a mother's fanatic vow is in turn given to Paphnuce who, on his fanatic mission, spurns it.

The orthodox teaching of the novel, if there be one, is apparently that man's pride and presumption are the cause of his undoing. But France was interested in something else. He did not wish to show that all the discipline of the flesh which Paphnuce visited upon himself was of no avail but rather that *this discipline itself was the cause of his downfall*. Asceticism, austerity are contrary to nature. They do not produce the noblest creation. And to prove his point, he contrasts the closing scene of Thaïs' life with the agony of the fanatic monk. Thaïs dies enraptured in the contem-

plation of a glory beyond mortal vision while the monk, devoured by lust, shakes his fist at heaven and curses the God who has guided him astray.

Albine, who governs the convent to which Paphnuce has led Thaïs, is, doubtless, the expression of a contrast to the austere monk, a contrast which the author has willed to present. Albine believes in an active, positive worship, developing the religious nature of the individual. She has long governed the convent life and makes it a rule not to go contrary to the nature of the individual soul. " All seeds bear not the same flowers, nor is every soul sanctified in the same way (1)." Thus Thaïs is given the roles of Esther, Deborah, Judith, and the Marys to interpret in the sacred representations. Her worship is the expression of her art and beauty, not the fanatic torture of the flesh for the cultivation of the spirit.

Just as Albine represents France's idea of natural, free expression and development, so Ahmès, the Christian slave, unjustly accused of theft and crucified, reveals the author's attraction for the simplicity and charm of religion. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the reflection of France's complex nature in the combination of Thaïs, the courtesan, and Nicias, the epicurean. The one reveals the sentiment, the other the intellectual phase of the author.

Both Thaïs and Nicias live the life of the flesh but with this difference. Nicias is the epicurean who believes there is nothing beyond this life itself, no other intelligence but that of the senses. " What

(1) *Thaïs*, p. 287.

we do not know does not exist. Why torment ourselves for what is not (le néant) ? (1). "

Thaïs, on the other hand, is beauty and weakness longing for some unknown mystery. She has been turned from good by the idea that suffering such as that of the slave Ahmès is the necessary price of virtue. But in answer to Nicias' question, " why torment ourselves ", she replies in anger, " I scorn those like you who neither hope nor fear. I wish to know ! I wish to know ! (2) ".

Intellectually, then, doubt is a soft cushion which sentiment cannot accept. Moreover there is, in this connection, the Anatolian repugnance to universal doubt, for any length of time, at least, on account of its sterility. Timoclès de Cos, the dweller in the desert, is pictured as the perfect skeptic to whom it is indifferent to live or to die. His opinion is to have no opinion and he passes his existence, crouched on the river bank, absorbed in impassive immobility. In *Sylvestre Bonnard* the author has already voiced his fundamental aversion to such passivity. " In spite of my calm aspect I have always preferred the folly of the passions to the wisdom of indifference.. And if this splendid enthusiasm is dying within me it is because my life itself is gradually snuffing out " (3).

To return to Thaïs : She is the character in whom Anatole France centers the sentiment of his complex nature — the curiosity and longing to know, the voluptuousness of religion and the worship of beauty. Nicias, on the other hand is given many of the ideas

(1) *Thaïs*, p. 105.
(2) *Ibid.*
(3) *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, p. 199.

on which France's intellect has played. The usual tone of Nicias' remarks is ironical ; the positive element in his character is tolerance. It is he who helps the monk and Thaïs to escape from the maddened crowd gathered at the burning of Thaïs' home. To the courtesan departing with the monk, now victorious in his quest and yet secretly vanquished, Nicias exclaims : " I possess the truths. He has only one of them ; I have them all. I am richer than he and, to tell the truth, am none the prouder nor the happier... For we all have but one motive in life, happiness, impossible happiness (1). "

Not only are the characters in *Thaïs* of interest in a study of France's skepticism but also the famous banquet scene, the " pageant " of philosophies. It is an opportunity for Anatole France to express a number of his favorite thoughts, not by any means concordant but all partaking of the same rational character. He is here the intellectual analyst, the dilettante. Many of these ideas recur in the later work of the author, such as his conception of Iaveh, which becomes the central theme of *La Révolte des Anges* and again shows his opposition to Christian dogma and belief.

This conception France expresses through the mouth of Zénothemis at the banquet. The Old Testament Iaveh is a god of violence visiting on Adam and Eve his vengeance for their disobedience. He maintained their seed in stupor and in fear. It is he who taught men injustice, ignorance and cruelty. He pursued the family of Cain because of its industry ; he exter-

(1) *Thaïs*, p. 200-201.

minated the Philistines because of their poetic compositions. In short " he was the implacable enemy of science änd of beauty and the human race expiated during long centuries in blood and in tears the defeat of the winged serpent (1) ". Just as Satan is contrasted with Iaveh in the *Révolte* so here the serpent's power is opposed to that of Iaveh. The serpent is described as " permeated with light and love ". Like Satan he takes pity on humankind and gives them knowledge. In the mind of Anatole France, Satan seems to be not the angel of evil but the angel of revolt against arbitrary repression, against the power imposing ignorance, suffering and servile worship. It is not the immutable god of heaven that is the source of intelligence and kindness but rather the fallen angel who, from his own suffering, comes to understand the evil on earth. Spurred to action by sympathy, he it is who rises to console man.

These ideas are, again, the reflection of his fundamental protest against the forces of repression, ignorance and bigotry. Sympathy and understanding are the true forces of progressive action and Satan is the embodiment of pity and intelligence through which progress is effected. There is, then, a positive as well as negative side to France's affirmation.

The various philosophies represented at the banqueting scene (2) are important only as a manifestation of France's dilettante interest. Here are the Anatolian *Philosophical Dialogues*. Like Nicias, France prefers his intellectual freedom and enters each man's

(1) *Thaïs*, p. 149.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 132-176.

thought to doubt or to deny. To Eucrite, the Stoic, for whom virtue consists in effort, he replies that the frog who tries to puff itself as big as an ox must then be a master-piece of stoicism. To Hermodore, vaunting the ecstacy of the soul, he says that no great difference is visible between the all and the nothing. The infinite resembles nothingness (le néant) because both are inconceivable. To be perfect one must cease to exist, a necessity undergone even by God. To Marcus, the Arian, he mockingly remarks that the Creation must have been a great crisis in the existence of God. Existing since all eternity, He finally made up His mind to undertake the creation and thus prove to Himself His own existence, though by so doing He lost His perfection.

Rationalism is the underlying tone of Nicias' remarks, rationalism and the scorn of metaphysics. Concerning God and the soul, men will never reach an understanding. They will rather agree on knowing nothing, " buried beneath the mass of contradictions which they have heaped high like Pelion on Ossa ".

Here, then, in *Thaïs* we have an excellent protrayal of the real France. His choice of subject, his treatment of Ahmès, Thaïs and Albine show his love of the naïveté, simple faith and mystery of the early Christian era. Into the mouth of Nicias he puts the phrasing of his intellectual skepticism and an appeal for tolerance. Through the contrast between the way of Paphnuce and the way of Albine, he reveals the evil of asceticism and of violence to nature and the corresponding good of intelligent understanding and free development of nature. Join, then, the tolerance and doubt of Nicias, the voluptuousness of Thaïs and the

wise freedom of Albine : oppose them to the sterility of the skeptic, Timoclès, and the violence of Paphnuce. Such is the essence of the philosophy of Anatole France at this period. Such were the qualities he found to admire in Rabelais, Montaigne, Voltaire and Renan. We have seen the definite expression of them in the novel, *Thaïs*, and now, in criticism, we shall see them form the basis of France's defense of intellectualism, the foundation of his doubt.

It is a general truth that, aroused by opposition and criticism, we react positively with an affirmation of our beliefs. Even the most skeptical of men, under these circumstances, reveals the positive side of his nature. Thus with his article on Bourget's *The Disciple*, published in June of 1889, Brunetière arouses Anatole France to direct affirmation. The latter writes in the *Literary Life* (1) : " I persist in believing that thought, in its own sphere, has rights for which limits cannot be set and that every philosophic system can legitimately be exposed. " It is the duty and the right of every savant to express his idea of truth, whatever the consequences. " The honor of the human intellect is at stake. "

Nevertheless France recognizes the dangers of liberty. Thought has armed more than one criminal hand. It is rather a choice between two possible evils. He would choose the side containing the least evil and possessing the greatest good at the same time. " Science and philosophy issued from science do not produce the happiness of humanity ; but they give it strength and honor. In spite of their apparent

(1) *Vie littéraire*, vol. III, p. 62.

insensibility they work toward the softening of custom ; little by little they make life richer and more varied. They counsel benevolence ; they are indulgent and tolerant. "

Here, again, is the emphasis on indulgence, tolerance and humanity. Thought should be left free in spite of its dangers, for there is greater risk for the human race in subordinating it. Prejudice and ignorance only too soon gain the upper hand. What the moral confusion of Adrian Sixte does teach is this : " Intelligence alone does not suffice to understand the universe, and reason cannot with impunity fail to recognize the reasons of the heart. " Truly an echo of Pascal himself ! Pascal of whom France writes : " There was never a more puissant genius in the world than that of Pascal. There was never a more miserable one (1). " Pascal scorned the arts and abhorred beauty. And they, together, formed for Anatole France the sovereign source and aim of life. Even France, the intellectual dilettante, cannot deny the necessity of the union of both intellect and sentiment. Nor is this the last time in his work that they will be found united. From this compound evolves the " tender scorn " of Jérôme Coignard. In the *Garden of Epicurus*, France takes Irony and Pity as counselors of human life, the one to render it lovable, the other sacred.

Once more in the *Literary Life* (2) Anatole France is thrown on the defensive by the critic, Brunetière. This time it is in behalf of impressionistic criticism. France is unwilling to accept any system or doctrine

(1) *Vie littéraire*, vol. IV, p. 216-217.
(2) *Ibid.*, vol. III, préface, p. x-xi.

even here. His opposition is directed toward the *certainty* of Brunetière's literary decisions. The universal agreement of men concerning common realities (on which Brunetière bases, in part, his argument) is sufficient, indeed, to form and to preserve society but cannot suffice in the realm of criticism where the personal equation enters to so large a degree. One should not, however, on account of its uncertainty abandon criticism, but rather leave it untrammeled by system. In criticism, also, France is making an appeal for tolerance and freedom.

In his own defense he protests that one should not read a doctrinal pyrrhonism from his emphasis on the fact that man is condemned to know things only from the impressions which they produce on him. He has glanced, he confesses, more than once toward absolute skepticism. But he has never entered its enclosure for fear of its sterility. He has believed in the relativity of things and in the succession of phenomena. In this early period, however, it is evident that he has believed in more than that. He is still, and will remain so, unwilling to restrict himself. He is on guard against dogmatism of all sorts, preferring to limitation his freedom, to condemnation his indulgence.

Yet it is of interest here to note that Anatole France does not hesitate to express his judgment and in no uncertain terms on the work of Emile Zola and George Ohnet. Ohnet he describes as the personification of the mediocre, as one who has carried to the point of genius " that variety of comfortable fatuity which the English call snobbery (1) ". Anatole France is

(1) *Vie littéraire*, vol. II, p. 60.

here condemning ; it is evident that he, also, has definite literary standards.

Zola he reproaches for (1) lack of taste and for gratuitous obscenity. Zola is devoid of any appreciation of the beautiful in peasant nature. In criticism of Zola's *La Terre* he protests in behalf of the instinct of beauty in man, in behalf of the pure heroic souls that do exist. Even weakness and error have a touching beauty. " Misfortune alone suffices to render man august to his brother. "

Thus it is clear that Anatole France, skeptic as he is intellectually, finds in his heart a source of affirmation. Unwilling, in this early period of his skepticism, to circumscribe himself in any way, he remains the intellectual dilettante. He appeals for tolerance because it allows freedom and individuality. He protests against Christianity which, though itself composing a certain beauty, brands as sin, beauty, art and love. He can understand the mystic rapture of Thaïs, the worship of Albine's convent, which is the natural expression of the individual souls. But asceticism and bigotry, resulting in the deformation of nature and in fanatic violence, these are the source of unnecessary suffering and ugliness in the world. Against these he vents his displeasure which, gradually becoming more intense, ends later in mortal hatred and the expression of bitter indignation.

Sylvestre Bonnard, a work of youth (France's maturity as author came late), is rather a work of age in its smiling indulgence, its mellow disillusionment. The volumes of criticism show an artistic detachment, a keen

(1) *Vie littéraire*, vol. II, p. 236.

curiosity. France believed in the right, nay, the necessity, for human progress, of unhampered thought and his criticism, most often the free expression of his impressions, is creative rather than critical. *Thaïs*, the last in chronological order, shows more definitely the increasing intensity of the author. It gives full expression to France's worship of beauty and tolerance, to his intellectual curiosity and ironical doubt. He is here artist, philosopher and dilettante. Not content with one truth, he must possess tham all and, possessing them all through the understanding, he teaches tolerance, indulgence and humanity.

CHAPTER THREE

The Period of the Coignard Books

With the year 1893 we have come to the series of books which represent the period of Anatole France's most profound skepticism. Wearied of the rather mild, smoothly philosophical Sylvestre Bonnard, he has given utterance in *Thaïs* to his dilettanteism and protest for freedom and beauty.

In the *Vie littéraire* he has judged as critic in no uncertain terms. His natural love of freedom, his hatred of dogmatism find fullest expression in impressionistic criticism. Though he prefers to yield himself to the caprice of his pen, still this caprice does not mean a languid oscillation among uncertainties. It is a source of emancipation from the academic. Art is very real to him and founded on eternal principles — clarity, simplicity, harmony and measure. Neither the vulgarity of Zola nor the mediocrity of Ohnet could he abide. The declamation of Hugo was distasteful to him. It was the poetry of Racine, the prose of Renan, which won and kept his life long admiration.

In 1893 *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque* and its sequel, *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard* open this period which includes also *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, *Le Lys rouge* (both of 1894) and *Le Puits de Sainte Claire* (1895). For a study of France's skepticism the first

two volumes and the *Garden of Epicurus* are the most important.

In the *Red Lily* (1) Anatole France continues, with constant crescendo, the tone of voluptuousness most evident in *Thaïs*. He is now interested in passion. He surrounds his lovers with the glory of Florence and the charm of Paris. Yet he produces no noble glorification of love nor does he convince one of the reality of the passion in the essentially refined and cultured heroine and her lovers. France believes that all love is physiological. " L'amour sensuel " is the only true and strong love (2). In its grasp man returns to his primitive self — the self of the flesh, of the senses and instincts ; civilization's refinement and elevation fade to nothing. The book itself is of interest for the unchallenged art of its composition and for the expression of certain favorite ideas of the author.

Paul Vence, the chief spokesman of these ideas, restates the thought, found so often in France's work, that, whether reading or listening, we merely translate, constantly expressing ourselves through the author. " Beautiful translations there are, perhaps ; but none

(1) The *Salon de madame Arman de Caillavet* of Jeanne-Maurice Pouquet informs us of the all important role of madame Arman in the composition of this novel. « The success of certain novels of society life irritated madame Arman somewhat and she had suffered from the disdain which elegant club men had shown France in her salon. She wished to prove that he, too, was capable of relating a fine story of Parisian love intrigue and that he was ignorant of none of the refinements of a milieu with which she had made him acquainted (p. 144). » It was she who suggested many scenes, organized the trip to Florence to obtain background and was herself a personal inspiration for much of the charm of the book's heroine.

The collection of letters and documents by Mme J. M. Pouquet is invaluable for its protrayal of the role played in Anatole France's literary life by the distinguished Mme Arman de Caillavet. But for her understanding, indefatigable energy and inspiration, we might never have had several of his finest volumes.

(2) *Le Lys rouge*, p. 356.

that is faithful. What is the readers' admiration of my books to me, since what they admire is what they themselves have read into them ? (1). "

Speaking of Vence's story (2) of a young artisan of strong virtue who is, however, not *intelligent enough to doubt*, France expresses his hostility to the fanatic thirst for martyrdom, founded, he believes, on ignorance. This artisan has read that the destruction of society will bring universal happiness. For him, to read is to accept and believe. Consumed by the thirst for martyrdom, he leaps upon the socialist deputy of his ward, is arrested, tried, condemned and guillotined.

What is France here expressing but his contempt for violence and ignorant fanaticism ? To him the danger of a mind which neither speculates nor doubts but rushes to immediate action is far greater than the menace of its opposite, the mind which accepts only to question and appraise, which abstains from action as from judgment. An indulgent tolerance is far more intelligent and human than all the well-intentioned fanaticism in the world. This is a recurrent theme in France's work. " Look at Pascal ! " he says. " He went insane. Look at the French Revolution ! It murdered thousands of human beings. "

Thought, free speculation, is the glory of man. It is superior to action. Repeatedly Anatole France names Napoleon as an illustration of his thought. Paul Vence, his spokesman here, describes the great empire builder. Napoleon had no philosophical curio-

(1) *Le Lys rouge* p. 203.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

sity (1). His thoughts were those of his grenadiers. He lived an exterior life and not the inner life of a speculative genius. " He had not a thought which was not an action and all his actions were great and common. It is this common grandeur which makes heroes. "

Doubt, to Anatole France is not a " common grandeur " but a " sublime dissatisfaction ". It is the leaven of progress. It is the agent to destroy prejudice and fanaticism and injustice. Indirectly it works as a constructive agent. " Slowly but surely humanity brings to realization the dreams of the sages. "

In 1893, however, the date of the publication of the Coignard books, Anatole France is far from making so positive an assertion. Spectator of life, living among his books and in the past, he is fond of pointing out the flaws of society, the contradictions and inconsistencies of humanity. Like Voltaire, he breaks up the foundations of certain customs and institutions. He penetrates their nature and reveals their stupidity and injustice. Like Voltaire again, he has humanity for his motive, bringing pity to temper his intellectualism. The pity France expresses in this period, however, is not the warm, surging emotion aroused later by the Dreyfus Affair ; it is pity mingled with scorn, " mépris " — an essentially aristocratic feeling, the result of a real sympathy rendered passive by intellectual detachment.

The 18th century priest, Jérôme Coignard, is an excellent expression of this intellectualism of Anatole

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(1) *Le Lys rouge*, p. 55-56.

France. A study of his character will reveal much concerning the mind which conceived him.

" The priest Coignard (1) was a free man in a humble position and that is enough, I believe, for one to place him far above a Bossuet, and above all those great personages who, in their rank, shine with the traditional pomp of customs and beliefs. " (Notice the scorn for the " traditional pomp of customs and beliefs. ") Coignard did not accept common opinion without previous examination — always excepting, of course, matters of religion ! He lacked all dogmatism and philosophically was a mixture of Epicurus and Saint Francis.

Of the real Saint Francis, however, there is little or none in Jérôme Coignard. His delight in belittling man, including himself, in order to foster the virtue of humility appears on first thought to be a franciscan trait. In reality, however, it is only the source of an indulgence readily absolving from past sin and if not inviting, at least not restraining from future frailty. The sentiment of holy simplicity on which France insists in the priest's character is due to his ingenuous confession of his own weakness as well as of others' and to his doubt of his own gifts which leads him to scatter " without solemnity the treasures of his intelligence (2) ". In reality Coignard is far from simple, whether of heart or of mind.

Both epicurean and franciscan elements of his nature lead to the same result — an indulgent tolerance. Even his religious belief — for such he calls

(1) *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard,* p. 10.
(2) *Ibid.,* p. 12.

it — brings Coignard freedom. Accepting, as he does, orthodox theology, he is rid of the temptation " of nibbling at some appetizing system of philosophy ", " one of those mouse-traps in which free spirits hasten to get caught (1) ". Instead he employs the principles of his religion to chase away " these gothic bug-a-bears which make the devotional life of the simple commoner a sort of mean daily witch-feast (2) ". He can allow himself all freedom, keeping untouched church dogma, for he trusts his powers of repentence and the bounty of divine grace. Hear him express himself in the *Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque.*

" And that is where one must admire the system of the Christian religion, which founds salvation principally on repentence. It is to be noticed, my son, that the greatest saints are penitents, and as repentence is proportioned to the sin, it is in the greatest sinners that is found the material for the greatest saints... the raw material for sainthood is lust, intemperance, all the impurities of the flesh and the spirit. It is important only, after having amassed this material, to work it according to theological art and to model it, so to speak, in the form of penitence, which is the matter of a few years, of a few days and sometimes of a single instant, as is seen in the case of perfect contrition (3). "

Coignard abounds in this " theological art ", which allows him, while professing to be a Christian, to remain essentially a pagan. Surely he can deceive no one,

(1) *Les Opinions,* p. 14.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 15.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 157-158.

unless it be Jacques Tournebroche, as to the perfect contrition of his last words at death.

" Cast away with my example the maxims which I have proposed to you during my madness, which lasted as long as my life, alas ! Fear women and books for the softness and pride which one gains with them. Be humble of heart and of spirit. God grants little men a clearer intelligence than the learned can communicate... My son, listen not to those who, like me, shall argue subtly on good and evil (1). "

The simple-minded Tournebroche could not perceive Coignard's secret self congratulation for this same madness he seemingly deplores, nor could he sense the subtle scorn his master feels for those little men, blessed by God, in their ignorant simplicity. The world to Jérôme Coignard was a garden of Epicurus, from which he departed with regret.

To continue now with Coignard's social satire : According to him, Pride is the source of man's ills, for, believing himself the center of the universe and intoxicated with the measure of society, his own creation, man boasts of justice only to inflict suffering and death about him. Man is so convinced of the justice of a law that he enforces it in blind zeal, regardless of the suffering caused by the imperfections of the law itself, or of the machinery by which it is executed. It is violence of belief, narrow dogmatism, in short, conviction of the superiority of man and consequently of the justice of his institutions which make of life the disfigured, ugly thing that it is.

Coignard will abase pride, then, by demonstrating

(1) *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*, p. 362.

the worthlessmess of human institutions. He will substitute tolerance and indulgence for fanaticism and violence. To do this he will show that man's imbecile nature has produced nothing worthy of being defended or attacked except for the sake of pleasure, as a sort of child's play — battles on the sea-shore. Men are but wicked monkeys, a truth which the leaders of the French Revolution failed tragically to recognize. Coignard says now what Fra Giovanni repeats later : Do not strive even for the public good with too great an intensity, lest violence and resulting cruelty enter into your striving (1).

In his conversation with the anarchist, Rockstrong, Coignard states his argument. As usual he first demonstrates Rockstrong's weak points. " You have in common with your enemies all human weaknesses and passions. You may have greater uprightness but, on the other hand, you are actuated by a spirit of discord and hatred. Though a victim of injustice yourself, you are not just (2). " The next step of Coignard's argument, which becomes almost a profession of faith, is to show how great an infirmity is the habit of reflection. Ironically, for we are sure of his inner conviction of the glory of thought, slyly, he praises men of action who think little or not at all, and succeed so well in their projects (3). The third step, one for which he has long been preparing, is his tender scorn of man. It is merely the result of his contemplation of human weakness and wickedness. " All the evils of civilized societies come from the

(1) *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*, p. 196.
(2) *Les Opinions*, p. 178.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 183.

fact that their citizens have for one another an excessive esteem and raise honor like a monster upon the misery of the flesh and spirit. They will be happy when, restored to the true appreciation of their condition, they will mutually scorn one another without excepting themselves from this wholesome scorn (1). " This " mépris " is a part of Coignard's positive belief, — his argument for tolerance.

First establishing, then, his principle of tolerance, Coignard proceeds to analyze and criticize human institutions — government, the courts and the army. The Church is here omitted, of course, but later, in the *Contemporary History*, France gives it no gentle treatment. Before entering the more particular discussion of peoples and their governments, Coignard gives a general statement concerning them.

" People take all the liberty which they can enjoy, or to express it better, they exact, with imperious command, institutions in recognition and as guarantee of the rights which they have acquired by their industry. All liberty comes from them and their own impulses. Their most instinctive gestures enlarge the mould of the State which is formed to fit them (2). "

Thus tyrannies and despotic governments exist only where the people is too imbecile and weak to require any other form. It follows, then, that to interest oneself in the form of government alone is merely to attack the exterior. That is what the anarchist does, as well as the other men of politics. The vital, the important thing, is to look beneath the form

(1) *Les Opinions*, p. 184.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 188-189.

of government into the condition of the people. Are the people ignorant, fanatic ? Do they live in poverty and helpless abasement ? What are the forces which prevent the people's growth in intelligence and well-being ?

These forces are ignorance and fanaticism, (whether intentional or not) and selfish monopoly. Seek out these; destroy them; establish in their place enlightened tolerance and well-being and the door to real progress will be opened. Here is the foundation of Anatole France's future socialism. Here lie the seeds for his own violence in the Dreyfus Affair.

Let us now examine Coignard's criticism of society. Changes of government he regards with misgiving. The new may be worse than the old, simply because of its newness, inexperience and consequent intolerance. Opposition is a bad school of government, for those who thus reach power generally govern by maxims opposed to their professions of principle (1). " The same obligations, to which their predecessors were forced to submit, guide them, too ". There are faults in all forms of government, absolute and liberal. In a democracy there is the " harsh slavery " of the common will which runs counter to the individual whose power of suffrage is only an attractive snare (2). Government is a sort of cloak which should be fitted to the people. " One can remedy it with a prudent shake, or with a stitch or so here and there and in case of need, with a very delicate application of the scissors in order to be obliged neither to incur the ex-

(1) *Les Opinions*, p. 67.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 25.

pense of another cloak as poor nor to retain the old one after time has changed the body which it fits (1). "

It is good to use the broom a bit in hit-or-miss fashion ; it frightens the vermin and prepares the necessary ruins (2). What Coignard means by the necessary ruins, he explains when he speaks of the destruction of " all false principles ". He is not afraid of the result of such healthy house cleaning for society. It will only sweep away the cobwebs and prepare a more habitable dwelling. As concerns government, then, Coignard is neither radical nor conservative. He would clear away prejudice but he would not advocate a new form of government. " Educate the people ", he would say. " Free them from their ignorance and suffering ; the government will then mould itself not only to their needs but to their capacity. "

Coignard's attitude toward war and the army is merely the continuation of the same views. The military profession is the one most natural to man ; one to which his instincts urge him (3). The soldier does not have to think ; his duties are decided for him and his vanity is flattered by the idea of glory. Even his courage is weak compared with that of the peasants and working people who every day risk dying of hunger and fatigue (4).

Unyieldingly hostile to war, Anatole France analyzes and judges its causes. In the *Human Tragedy* he shows that it is the rich who make war to preserve their present, or to gain future, possessions

(1) *Les Opinions*, p. 27.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 29.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 140-141.
(4) *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

while the poor, in their ignorance and misery, defend them. According to Coignard, war is declared to preserve honor and to conquer territory. " In the first case it is difficult to see how the prince's honor is purged by the blood of ten, twenty, thirty, or a hundred thousand men (1). " It is even more difficult to conceive how the theft of a province through war is any more honorable than a theft by an individual in peace.

The only superiority which civil war has over foreign war is the added chance the citizens have of knowing why they are fighting (2) ! What bitter irony ! Civil war arises from the extreme wretchedness of a people ; it is its only way out to a better life. And when France adds that it is worthy of note that " the more wretched and therefore excusable are those who revolt, the less chance they have to win ", he is doing so out of real sympathy for the oppressed, not, as one critic indicates (3), to justify or at least to excuse civil war. Coignard's last words, which continue the quotation, should be proof of it. " In short, my son, war, civil as well as foreign, is execrable and of an iniquity which I detest (4). "

The third target for Coignard's criticism is the institution of human justice. His tone is voltairian. The scene which begins the discussion reminds one of *Zadig* or of *Candide*. Coignard and his pupil are aroused to indignation at sight of a girl on her way to the scaffold. " It is no matter, sirs, " says a neighbor ;

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(1) *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard*, p. 146.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 148-149.
(3) *Maîtres de l'heure*, vol., II, p. 259.
(4) *Les Opinions*, p. 149.

" it's a servant girl whom they're going to hang for having stolen some bits of lace from her mistress (1) ". Coignard, this hardened realist, scorner of humanity, cannot continue his meal for thought of the mortal torture of the poor creature.

A discussion ensues in which, to the modern reader, is indirectly hinted a comparison between the justice of the 18th century and that of today. Coignard says : " I believe I perceive in our laws a cruelty which will appear clearly in the future and at which our grandchildren will grow indignant. " His neighbor, a man of the courts, replies : " All the gothic barbarity has been removed from our laws and customs ; and justice today is altogether too courteous and humane (2). " Is not France saying that still today exist similar cruelties in our laws and still people to defend these laws as altogether " too courteous and humane ? " We are reminded of *Crainquebille* and many passages of the *Contemporary History.*

What is this cruelty of which Coignard speaks ? First of all, that arising from the apportioning of punishment, not to the malignity of the crime but to the damage caused to society (3). Thus human justice is founded on material interests, for the protection of property. But, protests Coignard, private property is the result of " new or hereditary rapine ". Society has organized a game in which certain acquisitions are " according to Hoyle ", others are not. In essence, then, the distinction between them is arbitrary and the duty of the judge is to maintain this distinction.

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(1) *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard*, p. 212.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 228.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 229.

What is this, after all, but a protest against private property and vested interests, a protest against the injustice and inequality of fortune which France voices again and again in his work ? In *Fra Giovanni* we have an eloquent example. Outside the city Giovanni comes upon a laborer toiling in the marble quarries, miserably dressed and in a frightful condition of fatigue and malnutrition (1). Three times the monk greets him, " Peace be with you ". Only on the third salutation does the man reply.

" I shall have no peace until I die. Be gone, cursed crow, whose wishes tell me of good tidings that are but vain and empty. Go caw to simpler souls than mine ! I know the quarrier's condition is utterly wretched ; that for his misery there is no relief. From morning to night I tear loose the stones and for my work I receive a bit of black bread. And when my arms shall be less strong than the stones of the mountain, when my body shall be worn out, I shall die of hunger (2). "

Besides his criticism of the apportionment of punishment not according to the gravity of the crime but to the hurt to society, Coignard utters a protest against the punishment which is rendered the guilty as their *due*, against that fanatic virtue which says : " This man has sinned against society's law ; he *ought* to be punished. It is his just dessert " (3). And he continues his arraignment of human justice, which weighs light upon the powerful and heavy upon the weak (4),

(1) *Puits de Sainte Claire*, p. 177.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 178.
(3) *Les Opinions*, p. 234.
(4) *Ibid.*, p. 244.

which commits crime itself through capital punishment and fines and which is dependent for its execution on the prejudice of the judges and the weak support of juries. Men absolve the Pharisees and condemn the Magdalene. Why, then, do they insult Christ by placing his image in their courts ?

Constructively what does Anatole France say concerning the institution of justice ? Just two things. First, that the number of criminals diminishes with the number of the wretched (1). (And this is the foundation of modern social work). Second, what matters it whether there is justice in the laws if there is none in the human heart ? (And this is the work of tolerance and enlightenment.)

Where can be found a more eloquent arraignment of the present social system than in the story of *Crainquebille* or the *Human Tragedy* ? In the former Anatole France protests against a system of justice which is itself the cause of tragic injustice ; in the latter he protests against the selfish power which would keep the poor in their poverty and ignorance, which would reward them for their resignation with a promise to indemnify in a future life for this world's misery. Such is the social order of the Pharisees, an association of the Friends of Good, made up of doctors, judges, merchants and money changers of striking piety. They assemble every month to record the good deeds and reward the poor who have done them, with pieces of silver. The rewards are for servant girls who have served their masters without pay, for old men, who,

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 265.

having no bread, have begged for none (1) ! The Association considers the question of what is a good deed and places its approval on whatever has assured and insured the enjoyment of acquired riches. The duty of the poor is to defend the property of the rich. " And that is goodness. And the rich man has a servant bring him a basket full of bread which he distributes to the poor and that, too, is goodness (2)."

There is little need for comment on such a passage. Anatole France is again affirming his sympathy for the common people and again protesting against the Pharisaic agents of repression. He would not, however, advocate violence even in an effort to better conditions. " Let your desire for universal charity take on the fervor of a prayer and the gentleness of a hope (3). " " There are neither good nor wicked among men. But all are unhappy. And those whom neither hunger nor shame afflict are tormented by wealth and power. " This is the philosophy formed from the fusion of Coignard's pity and scorn. Its apparent tranquillity has beneath it the quivering indignation of the protest against Pharisaism.

Leaving the social satire of *Les Opinions* and of the story, *L'humaine Tragédie*, we come to one of the most important volumes for a study of France's skepticism. *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, published in 1894, is composed of thoughts jotted down probably during a period of several years. The chief difference between it and *The Opinions* lies in the greater amount of pure speculation and detachment found in *The Garden*. Anatole

(1) *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*, p. 186.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 188.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 196.

France is no longer absorbed in consideration of man on earth, his idiosyncracies and weaknesses. He seems, at times, to have risen entirely free from earth to a philosophic detachment which invites him to speculate on other worlds and other forms of life than man's. But the more detached he becomes, the more is he impregnated with the feeling of the constant flow of things. The farther he rises above the circumstances of human life in any historic period, the more does he feel enclosed by the walls of ignorance. From this frustration of intellectual effort springs a profound feeling of melancholy.

" I know that we are in a fantasmagory and that our view of the universe is purely the effect of the nightmare of this evil sleep which is life. That is the worst of all. For it is clear that we can know nothing, that everything deceives us and that nature cruelly mocks our ignorance and our imbecility (1). "

Renan, before Anatole France, expressed a similar disillusionment. " More and more I believe that we know very little of that which we should most like to know. In philosophy we must have confidence in infinite goodness and keep ourselves from vain questioning. One gains naught by importuning truth, by soliciting it everyday. " " Let us know how to wait ; perhaps there is nothing at the end of our search ; or perhaps, who knows, the truth is sad ? Let us not be in such haste to know (2). "

Another great thinker, Emerson, treats the same subject from a different point of view. " In past oracles

(1) *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, p. 84-85.
(2) Renan, *Feuilles détachées*, préface, p. ix-x.

of the soul, the understanding seeks to find answers to sensual questions and undertakes to tell from God how long men shall exist, what their hands shall do and who shall be their company, adding names and dates and places. But we must pick no locks... The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses is to forego all low curiosity, and accepting the tide of being which floats us into the secret of nature, work and live, work and live, and all unawares the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition and the question and answer are one" (1).

Anatole France could not have this patience and could not find this faith. The pillow of doubt was not soft to his head as to Montaigne's. To France living was a "tragic absurdity." "Physical and moral evil, the misery of the soul and of the senses, the happiness of the wicked, the humiliation of the just would still be endurable, could one conceive in them an order and economy, could one divine in them a providence (2)." For France this was impossible. The "savant striking against the wall in surrounding darkness" (his own figure) he must remain, though from it he gain only melancholy suffering.

Here, however, in the very midst of this inexplicable world of changing appearances he discovers a reality so poignant and so eternal that upon it he builds the frame-work of his philosophic thought. To his phenomenonism, as it has been called, which admits only the reality of sense material and seeks no further than the mechanical, historical, or socia-

(1) Emerson, *Essays*, First Series, p. 283-284. (The Over Soul.)
(2) *Le Jardin*, p. 36-37.

logical demonstration of the material and moral universe, to this disillusioned intellectualism of his, he adds a glorification of suffering ; suffering by which we remain human and love our fellow men ; suffering, the source of good, beauty and virtue ; suffering to which we owe pity, courage and all that makes life worth living.

" The earth is but a grain of sand in the infinite desert of the worlds. But if one suffers only on earth, it is greater than all the rest of the world (1). " So then, says Anatole France, let us pardon suffering, " cette divine méconnue " and be content with the happiness of this human life, " so sweet and so bitter, so evil and so good, both ideal and real and containing all things and conciliating all contrasts. There is our garden which we must spade zealously (2) ".

So then, not in spite of evil but because of evil, the world progresses. Suffering has produced industry and science, for men have striven to relieve one another. Art, too, has sprung from suffering, for its beauty and terror are inspired by the passions. The lessons of suffering " would inspire in us patience which is the most difficult of heroisms, constant heroism. They would teach us clemency and forgiveness ; they would teach us resignation, I mean the resignation in effort which consists in continuing to strike evil without becoming irritated by its invulnerable immortality (3) ".

But this again is tolerance and for tolerance are

(1) *Le Jardin*, p. 53-54.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 65.
(3) *Vie littéraire*, vol. I, p. 337.

needed pity and irony, the one to smile and make life pleasant, the other to weep and make it sacred. These two France takes as witness to human life. They are the symbols of his dual nature, the intellectual phase complemented by that of sentiment. The one alone would lead to sterility and France had not the courage to follow his doubt to its blighting conclusion — skepticism. Let us say rather that his own sensibility rendered it impossible.

Irony he loved. It was a means of defense for the idealist to keep himself tolerant and also an offensive for the idealist's masked affirmation. Coignard pokes fun at human institutions and human beings so as not to lose his free tolerance in hatred. But, wearied of the intellectual superiority of irony, France turns to pity, by which alone man remains truly human. It, is as though France felt that intellectualism and its expression, through irony, were another Ialdabaoth of the *Revolt of the Angels*, supreme impassive omnipotence shut out from the power of real comprehension by his proud, scornful superiority, by his condemnation of intelligence and curiosity. He would choose the fallen Angel, who, " blackened, broken, terrible, sublime ", contemplated the evil and suffering of earth, nourished in his heart the purpose to console men and rose to teach them freedom.

Let us now examine the subjects on which Anatole France indulges his skepticism — history, philosophy, science, criticism and reasoning itself. In the *Opinions* Coignard says that in history there are few truths and many contradictions. " What is history ? A collection of moral tales or else an elegant mixture of narration and harangue, according as the his-

torian is a philosopher or a rhetorician (1). " One should not seek truth in history, for truth consists in showing the necessary relations of things and the historian cannot establish those relations for lack of the capacity to follow the chain of cause and effect. Many historical facts depend upon unhistorical facts which history ignores. Moreover the distinction between the facts which enter history and those which do not is purely arbitrary.

Thus history is condemned to remain far from a science. A voltairian " conte philosophique " concludes his argument (2). Prince Zémire has been told that kings would be exposed to less error if they were enlightened by the past. Thus he commands his wise men to compose a universal history. At the end of twenty years the wise men present themselves before the king with a caravan loaded with six thousand volumes. The king, now " in the middle of life's path ", too burdened with the care of government to read the history, orders an abridgment made. Twenty years pass by again. When again the wise men present their history, abridged to fifteen hundred volumes, the king is too old to read them. In ten years the history is reduced to five hundred volumes, still too great a task for royal consumption. Five years later, on the king's death bed, the last wise man of the group whispers a summary of man's history : " They were born ; they suffered ; they died. "

In the *Garden* France calls history an art, not a science, an art in which one succeeds only through

(1) *Les Opinions*, p. 194-195.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 197-200.

the imagination (1). As in the *Opinions* he supports his argument by insisting upon the necessity of the historian to use his own taste and judgment in order to distinguish between historical and unhistorical facts and to weave them into an account. Moreover France brings out the uncertainty of the testimony on which history is based. At best, he concludes, history is only an approximation of truth. The subjective element will always remain, as in criticism, since it is man who writes both.

What Anatole France means is this : write history, study history, make use of history, not, however, as an infallible science, for such it is not and cannot be. History is an art and deserves the confidence which art warrants. Beware, therefore, of basing upon it a hide-bound system. Strive to eliminate from it error and prejudice but do not rob it of life and truth as do certain archeologists and paleographers. Do not compose it with the purpose of teaching the sovereignty of property rights or resignation of the poor to a capitalistic regime. Here again is France's abhorrence of *systems*.

A propos of science and criticism, Coignard betrays a sort of ill humor at the limitations imposed on the progress of the mind. " Man (2) is by nature a senseless animal and the progress of his mind is but the vain result of his restlessness. For this reason, my son, I mistrust science and philosophy as they are called. To my mind they are only an abuse of representations and of fallacious images and, in a certain

(1) *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, p. 140-141.
(2) *Les Opinions*, p. 124-125.

sense, the advantage of the Evil One upon our souls. I bear Mr. Descartes ill will and all the philosophers who, following his example, have sought in the knowledge of nature a rule of life and principles of conduct".

Why this ill feeling ? Because after all their search, these philosophers and scientists have only added spectacles and microscopes to their vision, a faculty subject to the illusions of the senses and therefore untrustworthy. With more delicate instruments the scientist merely discovers new appearances and thus is naught but the plaything of new illusions. The aimable Coignard becomes so incensed at human ignorance that he asserts he would have nothing to restrain him from committing suicide or from seeking oblivion in the life of the senses, were it not for the sacred truths of religion. (The sacred truths of religion were scarcely a restraining force for him indeed !) This is, however, pure exaggeration, founded on the ardor of his intellectual voluptuousness, as he himself admits : " I hate science because I loved her too much ; like voluptuous men who reproach women for having failed to equal the dream they formed of them. I have desired to know all and I suffer for my guilty folly (1)." " A proud bitterness and superb sadness (2) " possess him forever. In his restlessness of spirit he envies the simple and ignorant who question nothing and are not disappointed but in his heart he is like Voltaire's good Brahman who would not exchange his ill for others' peace at the price of the necessary ignorance.

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(1) *Les Opinions*, p. 129.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 131.

The same idea, accompanied with a similar ill humor, Anatole France expresses in the *Garden of Epicurus*. Reasoning can prove anything under the sun. " A sustained argument on a complex subject will never prove anything but the cleverness of the mind which conducted it (1). " Systems of philosophy have come and gone ; none has prevailed. Criticism itself is not absolute. " There is not a single opinion concerning literature which may not be easily refuted by the contrary opinion (2). " General opinion favors certain works but only by virtue of prejudice. As an example of France's argument, he gives the humorous mistake of some men of letters who scorned an unlabeled passage from Michelet. Criticism, too, must remain a work of art, free from prejudice and untrammeled by system.

What of aesthetics ? " A castle in the air ! " he cries. " They found it on ethics. But there is no ethics. There is no sociology ; nor biology either. The finished state of the sciences has never existed outside the mind of Auguste Comte and his work is but a prophecy (3). "

Nowhere does he find an absolute. Nowhere, then, is there certainty, except in the fact of human limitation. But prejudice and dogmatism and intolerance merely increase that woeful limitation. And who knows of what progress, however slow, the human mind will be capable when these are diminished and destroyed. Or perhaps, he adds in his joy of speculation, perhaps the future hope lies not in human hands

(1) *Le Jardin*, p. 213 sq.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 225.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 217 (found elsewhere as France constantly repeats himself).

but in those of a superior race to which it or another shall have evolved (1).

Such is the general attitude of Anatole France as found in the work of this period, a gentle hope for progress and a fervent prayer for tolerance based on a disillusioned intellectualism and real sympathy for humanity. First of all he is " the savant striking against the wall ", conscious of human ignorance, revolting against it and invaded by a proud bitterness. He envies the calm of ignorant simplicity but with secret preference for his superior philosophic melancholy. His very suffering leads him to sympathy for his fellow men, still entangled in the net of prejudice and fanaticism which cause unnecessary evil. He will try to relieve that state, though without hope of complete success, and when he has enlightened men concerning the false foundations, the injustice and imbecility of human institutions, he will have done much. For tolerance is already a measure of progress opening the way to free development. He would not change the outer forms so much as look to the inner conditions of life. It is from the people that a nation takes its form of government. Enlighten the people ; lay bare falsehood and hypocrisy, the forces of repression and selfish monopoly. Though progress is slow, it can come only through enlightened tolerance. History, philosophy, criticism, science are not absolute. They are forms of art and contain only portions of truth in a state as yet imperfect. Do not, for that reason, discard them but beware of too great confidence in any one of them. Use them to make life beautiful

(1) *Le Jardin*, p. 27-28.

and free, not to crush and deform it through violence and dogmatism. Such is France's skepticism.

Above all, the beauty and grandeur which spring from suffering reconcile France to life. It is the cry of the poet which his heart repeats, the cry of Alfred de Vigny : " I love the majesty of human suffering. " And in France it is an increasing love. Through suffering man is no longer the wicked monkey to be scorned ; through suffering he becomes an august creature worthy of pity and love. In the Dreyfus Affair, as we shall see, France's latent sympathy, detached now in calm speculation, becomes an active force.

CHAPTER FOUR

France's Work during the Dreyfus Affair

In 1897 the Dreyfus Affair aroused throughout the French nation a pitch of feeling which divided the country into hostile camps. Anatole France, whose critical analysis had already penetrated the weakness of the general state of affairs in France, beheld in the struggle a serious clerical danger, the movement of the forces of fanaticism and bigotry to gain power for the purpose of repressing much that he held dear.

An injustice had been done under military authority and powerful forces were marshalled to maintain that wrong. An innocent man had been condemned unjustly and illegally for treason which not he, but another, had committed. To the cause of justice and tolerance many intellectuals allied themselves, among them Émile Zola and later Anatole France. The famous letter "j'accuse" and the persecution as well as the prosecution of Zola are well known. But this is not the place to discuss the details of the Affair. The importance of the matter for this study lies in the fact that, under the stress of the Dreyfus agitation, Anatole France left behind his rather passive sympathy for the oppressed to take his stand with the socialists.

There is no doubt that his anticlericalism was one of the chief elements to produce this positive step. In France's opinion, beneath the Dreyfus Affair lay

the work of the antisemites whom the clerical party soon joined, alarming the people with charges of plot and treason. " It did not yet show itself in the light of day and formed in the shadow an immense and mingled mass in which could be divined a resemblance to the mailed robes of the Leaguers. But when it had rallied all the forces of the counter-revolution, drawn to itself those discontent with the Republic, in short, raised before it all the human dust which the windy draught of opinion is able to do, then, it arose, immense and spotted, and took the brilliant name of nationalism (1). "

In the *Contemporary History* France treats of the corruption and worldliness of the Church and aims his attack at the false position of both Church and State in their union together. It is possible that his criticism may have had an influence on the separation of Church and State in 1905. Certain it is that he laid bare many abuses arising from the situation, and in the character of Guitrel presented an example of the intriguing, unctuous prelate taking advantage of the political and social elements in Church advancement.

Besides his anticlericalism, the loosely woven story of Mr. Bergeret continues France's discussion of the problems of government, justice and the army, contained in the Jerome books. The general attitude is the same but in the Bergeret volumes the intensity of feeling has increased. Even the exterior lightness of tone of Coignard has changed to the more thoughtful seriousness and, at times, bitterness of Bergeret. A

(1) *L'Église et la République*, p. 32.

new hope, however, seems to have absorbed the thought of Anatole France toward the last of this series of volumes. His sympathy has been definitely caught for socialism. Already in the *Human Tragedy* we have seen his humanitarianism take a socialistic cast. Now, in the disgust and disillusionment caused by the display of ignorance and fanaticism in the Dreyfus Affair, he turns all the more eagerly to the movement of the carpenter, Roupart. Content before with criticism, with the joy of discovering important truths and with the feeling of pity for the victim of social injustice, Anatole France now becomes interested in the movement looking toward a rectification of social evils.

It is through the impulse of the heart rather than that of the intellect that France turns toward socialism. Socialism itself was too dogmatic to win his entire allegiance but it was a movement toward what he conceived as real progress for the relief of humanity. Capitalism was a system developed for the benefit of a selfish minority ; it resulted in repression through authority, founded on the might of private property and finance, and it produced war for the defense of that property. France's utopia was a place where all should toil and likewise all should share in the fruits of that toil. He did not hope nor wish to relieve man of all the evils of human condition but rather of the " artificial ", unnecessary evils arising from the social system.

Let us now take up a closer study of the *Contemporary History*. The central thread of the narrative of the first three volumes is the conflict between the two priests, Guitrel and Lantaigne, in their aspiration to the bishopric of Tourcoing. France chooses

thoughtfully the characters of the two priests, Lantaigne and Guitrel to contrast what to him was the sincere, strong churchman with the unctuous, worldly prelate.

Through the double portrait we can see how profound was his anticlericalism, how fundamentally he was opposed to the Church. The Church in his eyes cannot fail to be one or the other ; intolerant in its faith, however idealistic, arbitrary and repressive in its administration, or worldly, hypocritically indulgent, currying a favor it cannot command.

In *Thaïs* through the character of Paphnuce, earnest and sincere though he was, France showed the violence of fanaticism which was its own agent of destruction. In Jérôme Coignard he gave us the keen, irreverent intellectual of the eighteenth century with his indulgence and his irony. In Lantaigne Anatole France now portrays the earnest scrupulous priest, " man of virtue, science and eloquence (1) ". He is a true descendant of Bossuet and sees in the continuity of the history of France not the influence of her kings, presidents, and prefects but of the Church, which, from the time of the Gauls, has subsisted without change or diminution (2). His attitude toward the Republic is frankly hostile. He opposes its principle of liberty, which is contrary to the will of God who has delegated to the priests a share of his authority... He opposes equality and tolerance, for they, too, do not accord with the divine plan, and lastly he asserts that the Republic is evil because of its " religious indifference ; i. e., its incredulity and blasphemies (3) ".

(1) *L'Orme du Mail*, p. 61.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 229.

To Mr. Bergeret who is anxious to know how this man of science as well as of religion construes the miracle of Joshua and the sun, Lantaigne, without hesitation, answers : " Yes, I have two distinct opinions concerning the interpretation of this miracle. As physicist, I believe, for reasons drawn from physics, i. e., from observation, that the earth turns about the motionless sun. And as theologian I believe that Joshua stopped the sun. There is a contradiction but not an irreducible one. For the idea which we form of the sun is purely human. It concerns only man and cannot be binding to God. For man the sun does not turn about the earth. I agree, and I believe Copernicus right. But I shall not go so far as to oblige God to become like me a Copernican and I shall not seek to know if, for God, the sun does or does not turn about the earth (1) ". Lantaigne does not agree with those who would accord science with religion. God has not given us His science, but only a small part of it.

Although Bergeret and Lantaigne have a common bond in their interest in general ideas, still on only one point do they find themselves in agreement : i. e., in their skeptical attitude toward the virtues of the Republic. Even here Bergeret announces his preference for the republic with its " facilité de vivre (2)". Its very weakness to him is a guarantee of liberty and peace. The democratic government is modest, humble and, being without pride, it is not pitiless and cruel (3).

Lantaigne is a man of uncompromising firmness and keen intelligence, whose one great passion is the

(1) *L'Orme du Mail*, p. 106-7.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 234.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 235.

Church, to which he subordinates all other interests. He represents France's idea of what an intelligent, sincere man of the Church must necessarily be, carrying his faith to its logical conclusion.

Parenthetically we might state that it is Lantaigne who, dismissing the skeptical and sensitive young Firmin Piedagnel, causes in him a sudden and absorbing feeling of hatred for the priests, " an imperishable and fecund hate, a hate that would last a life time ". It is a passage in which many critics like to read a reflection of some experience of the author himself.

Through the character of Lantaigne and the expression of his opinions, France is revealing his conviction of the fundamental and eternal opposition of the Church to free examination, to unhampered political development, to individualism and to tolerance. The Chruch is necessarily intolerant and ambitious. In its scrupulous, enlightened representative it so reveals itself. What will it appear in a Guitrel ?

Guitrel is very extensively and subtly characterized. His manner is obsequious and discreet, leaving one everything to hope and nothing to fear. He has the soul, the face and almost the sex of the second-hand clothes dealers of Mme. Worms-Clavelin's youth (1). He possesses the qualities of Polonius in the famous scene with the mad Hamlet. To the prefect who has stated his preference for amazons rather than nymphs on a prize cup Guitrel murmurs : " Yes, amazons, without doubt. " And to the prefect's wife who prefers lady centaurs, he says : " Lady centaurs, in fact, or perhaps man centaurs (1). " It is a light touch but

(1) *L'Orme du Mail*, p. 48-49.

one of many in which France portrays with keen penetration the complacency of the priest.

There is nothing spiritual about Guitrel. He is ambitious, selfishly so, not in the interests of the Church. He is a shrewd bargainer, a man of clever insinuation. When the prefect, worried over the influence of the prophetess, Deniseau, goes to him to have him intercede with the archbishop, Guitrel consents on condition that the salary of seven priests, discontinued by the last minister of cults, be returned (1). He will not say straight-forwardly that the prophetess is a hoax but he insinuates that the zeal of M. Laprune must have gone astray at the thought that the parish of Saint Exupere might be so privileged that in it, preferably to any other parish of the city, such a manifestation might take place (2).

Guitrel is the candidate of the ladies and through feminine machinations of disgusting immorality it is he who is appointed to the bishopric of Tourcoing. Smooth, hypocritical, feline, when once in power he shows his claws and the government which promoted him for his complacency finds in him an enemy, shrewd, violent and ambitious.

Thus we have in Lantaigne the straight-forward priest, by faith and nature intolerant, uncompromising, imperious and in Guitrel, the hypocritical, mild and indulgent priest, concealing his shrewdness and the real violence of his ambition under a cloak of unction. France seems incapable of conceiving the men of the Church in any other mould than these two.

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(1) *L'Orme du Mail*, p. 177.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Not only here does he show his anticlericalism but in his comments on the Dreyfus Affair. It is the Church which has fanned to white heat the feeling against the Jews. It is the Church which has supported the army and their union is the cause of infinite danger to the Republic.

What has M. Bergeret to say on the subject ? First as to the army. He deplores the colossal armaments of modern nations as a tremendous financial burden and as a source of repression of the impulse of liberty. " Whether the State be monarchy, empire or republic, its chiefs have an interest in maintaining compulsory service for all, in order to lead an army instead of govern a nation (1). " To lead an army is far easier and more profitable than to govern a nation. Bergeret sees little hope for the end of armaments, for the people themselves seem dazzled by the images of glory and power and are lead by an over-zeal of patriotism.

As to the Church ; Bergeret's expression of opinion is closely related to the Dreyfus Affair which first enters in *The Amethyst Ring*. The passage is so typical in its concentrated irony that I quote in full :

" I repeat, " said M. de Brécé, " that agitation aroused concerning this affair is, and can be, only an execrable manœuvre of the enemies of France ".

" And of religion ", softly added the priest Guitrel. " And of religion. It is not possible to be a good Frenchman without being a good Christian. And we see that the scandal has been raised chiefly by free thinkers and free-masons, by Protestants ".

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(1) *Le Mannequin d'osier*, p. 30-31.

" And by Jews, " continued M. de Brécé, " by Jews and Germans, And what unheard-of audacity as to question the decision of a court-martial! For, indeed, we cannot admit as possible that seven French officers have been mistaken... Can we, general ? "

" Not easily ", answered general Cartier de Chalmot. " For my own part I should admit it with difficulty. "

" The syndicate of treason ! " exclaimed M. de Brécé. " It is unheard-of (1). "

It would be difficult to get in more concise and picturesque form a presentation of the prejudices and ignorance involved in the Affair. Later in the volume the subject comes up for discussion again, along much the same lines.

M. Bergeret, to the surprise of all about him confesses his belief that a military court is quite capable of error. And, as they protest, he replies gently, " I do not know whether you will ever be enlightened... I think not, although anything is possible, even the triumph of truth (2). "

In the last volume of the *Contemporary History*, M. Bergeret expresses his proud satisfaction that he, too, like Zola, has been deemed worthy of the abuse of the anti-dreyfusists. " I have not done much. But anyway I ran some risk... So what worthier recompense may I expect, what reward higher and finer in its severity than the insult of the enemies of justice ? (3). "

The enemies of justice are defeated within themselves, however. The time has passed when the " scorn of

(1) *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, p. 21-22.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 150.
(3) *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 204-205.

intelligence and the hatred of justice were both a popular opinion and a doctrine of State (1). " True, it may return, for the adversaries of truth have not yet confessed their error but their defeat is certain. "What matters it, then, that legal sanctions are slow to come or do not come at all ! It matters no more in our social state than it mattered in the early days of the Earth, when already the great saurus of the primitive oceans were disappearing before the animals of a lovelier form and better instinct, that there still remained stranded on the sand of the beaches some few monstrous survivals of a condemned race ! (2) " By his eloquence Bergeret betrays his earnestness. A pity it is that circumstances belied his faith, as Bidault-Coquille is forced to admit in *Penguin Island.*

The first definite mention of socialism is found in *Le Mannequin d'osier.* Lantaigne pessimistically has predicted future catastrophes as a result of the public indifference to good and evil. Bergeret answers that this indifference is a peaceful one, insuring against war within as well as without the country. The very mediocrity of the government is a guarantee against war. Peace and war nowadays depend not on monarchs but on international finance whose force someday will be destroyed in the laborers' revolution. " The socialistic Europe will probably be a friend of peace. For a socialistic Europe there will be, if such it can be called, this unknown thing which is approaching " (3). So it is M. Bergeret himself who has apparently turned prophet of the new movement. His hatred of capi-

(1) *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 210.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 211-212.
(3) *Le Mannequin d'osier*, p. 248.

talism and his love of peace are here the directing influences.

Intellectually, however, he prefers to retain his freedom and fundamentally he opposes the limitation of the political party. It is only by enthusiasm, by a sort of violence done his intellectual liberty, that he yields to socialism. M. Mazure, the free thinking anti-clerical, upbraids Bergeret for firing upon his republican friends. Only through solidarity can they defeat the clerical power. To which Bergeret replies : " I see in that, above all, a partisan interest. And if I *were forced* to join one party or the other, I should unquestionably join yours, since it is the only one which I could serve without too much hypocrisy. But fortunately I am not reduced to *that extremity*, and I am in nowise tempted to shackle my mind in order to enter a'political compartment'. To tell the truth, I remain indifferent to your disputes because I realize the inanity of them. There is at heart little difference between you and the clericals. It they followed you into power, the condition of the people would not be changed and it is the condition of the people which is important in the State (1). "

Anatole France here definitely states his aversion to partisan narrowness and subordination. He prophecies his own future well meaning hypocrisy when the socialistic hope of changing the condition of the people will draw him, too, into " that extremity ". At heart he never ceases to remain hostile to the violence and dogmatism of socialism. Practical, applied

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(1) *Le Mannequin d'osier*, p. 316-7.

socialism becomes like its political enemies and France is later forced to deny it allegiance. His sympathies engage him in a step against which his intelligence has warned him.

Continuing his reply to. M. Mazure, M. Bergeret remarks that there does not exist on the one hand a civil code of morals and on the other a religious one. Morals are the result of custom and habit. There are as many Christian codes of morality as ages and countries traversed by Christianity (1). And he proceeds to demon strate how little difference there is in reality between the practice of the " concordataires " and that of M. Mazure and his friends.

" Haven't you the same morality in respect to the organization of labor, to private property, to capital, to the whole economic system of present society, the injustice of which you both endure with equal patience when you're not suffering from it ? You would have to be a socialist for it to be otherwise... You quarrel with them on points which interest only politicians and do not concern society, justly indifferent between the two of you. Faithful to the same traditions, yielding to the same prejudices, plunged into the same darkness, you devour each other like crabs in a basket (2). "

Anatole France is here showing not only a certain keen sighted tolerance but, underneath it and far more important, an absorbing interest in those prejudices and that darkness which for some time he has been penetrating with his analysis. He is referring to the

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(1) *Le Mannequin d'osier*, p. 323.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 326-327.

social system — the organization of labor, the institution of private property and capitalism.

What is France's idea of socialism ? In the *Contemporary History* it appears to him as a great ideal working against war and capitalism for peace and fraternity. The carpenter Roupart is the spokesman for this idealistic movement. He is convinced of the injustice done Dreyfus. He protests against the selfishness of citizen Flechier and he explains his idea of socialism as justice and kindness.

" It seems to me that to combat an injustice is to work for us, the proletariat, on whom weighs all injustice. In my opinion everything which is equitable is a beginning of socialism. I think as Jaurès does, that to march with those who defend violence and falsehood is to turn one's back on the social revolution. I know neither Jews nor Christians. I know only men and I make no other distinction between them than that of just and unjust. Whether they be Jews or Christians, it is hard for the rich to be equitable. But when the laws are just, the people will be just. Even now the collectivists and liberals are preparing the future by combating all kinds of tyranny and by inspiring in the people the hatred of war and the love of humankind (1). "

But the greatest improvement will take place when the " boss " will become a workman in the midst of his fellows and no longer profiteer by his superior intelligence. There will be no wages in Bergeret's republic ; all will be owned in common. His idea is collectivism, which he defends warmly. " And when

(1) *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 247.

you think that I am sacrificing the private individual for the State, life for an abstraction, it is on the contrary the abstraction which I subordinate to the reality, the State which I suppress by identifying it with social activity (1). "

Industry will progress, then, and this progress will decrease the laborers' wretchedness, for each will share alike in his labor. No man shall reap the fruits of others' toil. And with this betterment of conditions men will become less ferocious and more human (2).

Suffering, however, will not cease, nor would Bergeret have it so. Sacred pity, which forms the beauty of the soul, would perish simultaneously with suffering. (How often is this repeated !) Moral and physical evil will always share with joy and happiness the empire of the earth. Evil is necessary. It is the " artificial evils ", resulting from our social condition which will cease to exist. " Men will no longer be deformed by a harmful labor from which they die rather than live. The slave will come forth from prison and the factory will no longer devour millions of human bodies (3). "

Still vague and idealistic is this concept of future society. Its very vagueness and idealism are the source of Bergeret's enthusiasm. There is no unyielding dogmatism about it, no hint of partisan platform which might frighten his love of intellectual freedom or cool his humanitarian sympathy. He is still the cautious dreamer and has no illusions as to the speed with which his dream or another's may be realized.

" I believe that the reign of violence will last a long

(1) *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 255.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 245.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 249.

time still, that a long time still people will tear one another to pieces for frivolous reasons and the citizens of one nation will continue to snatch from one another the necessary goods of life instead of making an equitable distribution of them (1). "

He would like to work for this future society in which each should receive the value of his work but he knows he will not behold the realization of that dream. The future is an unfinished web at which the weavers continue hopefully to work. For " the dreams of the philosophers have ever aroused men of action who have set about bringing them to realization. Our thought creates the future (2). "

Such, then, is France's nascent socialism. His gentle hope has become almost enthusiastic and the fervor of his prayer has worded a dream. He seems convinced of the progress of humanity, though necessarily slow and he aspires to a share in the far off future truth through the power of this thought. He is still true to himself, to his love of free speculation and tolerance as well as to his sympathy for his fellow men.

(1) *M. Bergeret à Paris*, p. 244.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 256.

CHAPTER FIVE

France as Socialist

The definite expression of France's socialism, if such it can be called, comes in the first five years of the twentieth century. It is found in two volumes, the one, *Toward Better Times*, the other, *On the White Stone.* Together they word his vague, idealistic dream into more concrete form. *On the White Stone*, published in 1905, is a double view, a glance into the past and a glance into the future, the two loosely knit together by philosophical dialogue.

Toward Better Times, though published in book form in 1906, is a collection of forty-six speeches and letters, covering a period of eight years, from November 29, 1898 to February 24, 1906. They are the active work of Anatole France as a spokesman for the socialist party. They are, then, examples of France in his most assertive period. What subjects does he treat and what is the general tone ?

The first address is that given at a meeting concerning the Dreyfus Affair, in which he praises the fidelity and courage of lieutenant-colonel Picquart, then in prison (1898) on account of his steadfast investigation and support of the innocence of Dreyfus. Two other speeches relating to the Affair are those concerning Zola, the first in 1902 at his funeral, and the

other in 1906 at the eighth anniversary of the letter " j'accuse ".

Zola, whose literary work France has in no uncertain terms condemned, is here reinstated because " he fought social wrong wherever he met it. In his last books he showed his fervent love of humanity. This sincere realist was an ardent idealist (1) ".

The contradiction here is only apparent, not real ; Anatole France is discussing two different subjects, first, in the *Vie littéraire*, Zola's literary work which he finds lacking in taste and truth ; second, in the funeral address, Zola's active service to humanity, of which he warmly approves. It may be that France is forcing himself in his socialistic vehemence. Still he is sincere in the expression of his sympathy. Were he dealing with a purely literary valuation of Zola, he probably would make little change in his statement. Throughout his literary work he remained conservative.

Other subjects of the speeches are the education of the proletariat, the Armenian massacres, the suffering of the Russian people, the establishment of a cooperative restaurant, the separation of Church and State, pacifism, colonial politics and open diplomacy. A somewhat incongruous mixture for France, the aristocrat of the intellect ! There is a series of speeches on famous men : Ernest Renan, Diderot, Etienne Charavay, Victor Hugo, Pierre Lafitte, Emile Zola and Theophile Braga.

Diderot he calls " the best of men in the best of centuries " (2). He echoes Hugo's words of 1850 in his

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, partie VI, p. 9.
(2) *Ibid.*, partie I, p. 45.

struggle against the clerical movement to take charge of education in France. " There is not a poet, a writer, a philosopher, a thinker which you (the clerical party) accept... What have you made of Italy ? What have you made of Spain ? (1) " At the funeral of the positivist leader, Pierre Lafitte, Anatole France, though " a stranger to their doctrine ", speaks of the debt owed by all to Auguste Comte. " Is it not this great philosopher who has turned us aside from the vain fabrications of metaphysics ? Is it not from him more than from any other that we get our confidence in the experimental method ? Do we not owe him, in short, the happy idea of a morality founded on human solidarity ? (2) " France's Renan address is an acknowledgement of the disciple's admiration and indebtedness. The Greek goddess is speaking : " The towers of ignorance and error will crumble to earth. Thus you have said : Nothing resists, nothing lasts but that which I (Pallas) have measured and calculated, for I am foresight, order and measure, for I am the thought of all the men who think, the science of all the men who have knowledge, your science and your thought, O Renan !

" Receive from my hands the golden branch which your care has made to grow... All that you have conceived that is beautiful and good remains and nothing shall be lost. Slowly, but eternally, humanity brings to realization the dreams of the sages (3). "

What general relation have all these speeches to one another ? Above all, there is, as in all his previous work, a fundamental protest against exterior author-

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, p. 63-4.
(2) *Ibid.*, partie II, p. 15.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 56.

ity, whether of Church or social system. There is a strong current of humanitarian sympathy, and a more firmly expressed hope in the rise of the proletariat.

In all three of the speeches concerning the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks in 1903, he speaks of " the diplomacy of humanity ". He protests against the diplomatic selfishness of the great powers who disregard their responsibility engaged in the treaty of Berlin and say to Turkey, 'You may kill provided you pay ! " " Before crime there is but one diplomacy ; that of humanity (1). "

In his speeches for the Russian people at the time of the bloody tyranny of the tzar, he is aroused not simply by sympathy for their suffering. He protests against the three " isms " — the militarism, imperialism and clericalism of the Russian government. He points out the inconsistency of republican France allying herself by secret treaty and by financial loan to such a regime. There is a menace in France, too, of a partial return of the forces of oppression and violence and this menace exists in the universal triumvirate of priest, soldier and financier. France speaks for the solidarity of an enlightened proletariat against these forces.

As in the *Contemporary History*, Anatole France is a pacifist and looks to the international federation of workers to establish peace. A source of constant danger for European peace lies in the secret diplomacy and imperialism of the nations. Concerning secret diplomacy he says : " The habits of our diplomacy have not changed since Louis XV... And yet certain things are

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, partie II, p. 22.

changed in France since then ; the army, for instance, which is no longer composed of mercenary soldiers, Germans or Swiss, and of poor devils recruited on the Pont Neuf by sergeants La Fleur and Brindamour... And if it is the diplomats who determine war, it is the soldiers who fight it. Whence it follows that for a different army is needed a different diplomacy, for an army of citizens, open diplomacy ; for a republican army, public diplomacy. The proletariat, whatever one has said of it or whatever one may cause it to say, has a thought for national defense (1). "

Anatole France was thus in sympathy with much of the Wilsonian program. His ideas were not his own but those of Jaurès and his followers. In fact, his socialism is that of Jaurès on the whole, Jaurès whom he loved and admired.

Concerning colonial politics, imperialism, he continues the thought of M. Bergeret. To him all imperialism is a sort of barbarity due to the cupidity of commercialism. The white nations with their sense of superiority establish protectorates and possessions as so many markets for their products and source of their raw material. Under the guise of educating the blacks, for instance, the French have surrendered them to the selfishness of the trafficking Europeans from whom they receive only a heritage of vice and suffering. Look at the history of Africa, of America, of Asia. " For four centuries now the Christian nations have been contesting with one another for the extermination of the red, yellow and black races. That is what goes by the name of modern civilization (2). "

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, partie III, p. 69-70.
(2) *Ibid.*, partie III, p. 74.

Again these are not original ideas that France expresses. They are not radical, extremist or dogmatic. They are those of the broad minded enlightened thinker.

So much for his views on imperialism and militarism, two of the three dangers menacing society. The third, clericalism, is, perhaps, in his eyes the deadliest of all because the most far reaching and fundamental. It is the source of the " vain terrors " which keep the people ignorant, teaching resignation to suffering and to outer authority. He would separate Church from State, for one thing. For another he would educate the common people. He has more than once stated his belief that a nation obtains the form of government which its people deserves and therefore that most important for progress is the bettering of the condition of the people. Thus we find him speaking enthusiastically at the inauguration of several popular universities. " Teach the people, " he says, " the great physical laws governing the universe and thereby clear away the prejudices which produce suffering. " " It is science which frees the mind from these vain terrors (1). " It is joy that is good. " Let us not fear joy ; and when a happy form or smiling thought offers us pleasure, let us not refuse it... It is for you, citizens, for you, workers, to uplift your minds and hearts and render yourselves capable, through study and meditation, of preparing the coming of social justice and universal peace (2). "

In addition to enlightening the people, however, it is necessary to provide them with good living con-

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, partie I, p. 18.
(2) *Ibid.*, partie I, p. 22.

ditions. "How can you expect creatures who live, six, eight, twelve — father, mother, children — together in one disgusting room to think with delicacy and to form for themselves a somewhat noble appreciation of things ? And can one offer, without irony, the magnificent treasures of the human mind to beings whom vermin devours in garret rooms and who, sleeping, breathe typhus or tuberculosis ? (1) "

We must admit, however unnatural this sounds in the mouth of Anatole France, that he has admirably caught the spirit. For the time be believed in it. He was interested and sincere. As stoicism was unnatural to Montaigne, however, so socialism as a system and a party was essentially unnatural to Anatole France. He sympathized with its idealism but eventually recoiled from its dogmatism and selfishness.

France's socialistic dreaming is continued in the second part of *On the White Stone* while the first part recalls the *Garden of Epicurus* in its abstract speculation and irony. The stories, *Gallion* and *Par la Porte d'ivoire*, loosely welded into a whole by conversation, are an evocation of the historic past and of the dreamed future. *Gallion* was written to show how blind are the highest intellects at times to an understanding of the forces forming the future at their very side. Neither Saint Paul nor Gallio was conscious of the future, though Saint Paul, the despised Jew, was much more so than Gallio, the wealthy official.

Anatole France has here set himself to work upon the riddle of the future. It is a fascinating game not without clues for the guesser. Knowledge of the past

(1) *Vers les Temps meilleurs*, I, p. 9.

is a guide to that of the future and science affords us reason for some predictions ; as to eclipses or the dying of the sun and constellations. This reflection inspires in France a passage in which we might imagine the voice to be that of Renan. " But what matters death ? what matters such disintegration to universal life ? In the breath of God it will be but a moment. All will begin over again. The worlds will be reborn. They will live again to die. Life and death will succeed each other in an eternal round (1). "

In the person of Langelier, France expresses the " melancoly bewilderment " which such speculation inevitably inspires. Discouraged, he turns back his glance upon the " approaching destiny of our fellow men ". But unfortunately men dare not prophesy change, for they dare not confess that codes of morals are dependent on custom. " They fear to dishonor themselves in the eyes of their contemporaries by assuming that horrible immorality which is the future morality (2). "

Observation, however, of past social changes allows men to conceive similar future changes. Thus on the observation of the change from slavery to serfage, from serfage to a wage earning state can be founded the prediction of a new form of production. By studying the features of the present system and evolution, it is possible to decide, on a basis of probabilities, in lieu of certainties, whether collectivism will some day be realized, " not because it is just, for there is no reason to believe in the triumph of justice, but be-

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 180.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 189.

cause it is the necessary consequence of the present state and the fatal result of capitalistic evolution (1) ".

The question of the end of war, too, can be determined more or less by such a study of past and present. Langelier asserts that there is nothing to prove that war is one of the essential conditions of society and he bases his argument on the peaceful state of the long pastoral period in man's development (2). War came with the agricultural, industrial and commercial epochs when men sought to acquire property, land, wives and live stock by force of arms. To protect property already acquired, or to procure more, such was the foundation of war. Thus in the Middle Ages were constituted modern nations, — by war. Even the Renaissance, though an awakening of thought, gave new cause for war in the new discoveries. Nor has modern civilization ceased to present the spectacle of the extermination of red, yellow and black races by the white.

This same evolution, however, continued in a far off future will produce the advent of peace. As the Augustan world was united in peace and unity under the Roman eagles, so the modern world will be unified, though by different means and in a different manner. " The increasing net-work of communication and exchange, the forced solidarity of the financial markets of all the capitals, of the commercial markets which struggle in vain to guarantee their independence by unfortunate expedients, the rapid increase of international socialism, all seem destined to assure, sooner

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 193.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 197.

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or later, the union of the peoples of all continents (1). "

Other wars there will be, however ; the fierce instincts of man, added to his pride and hunger, will produce them until a time far beyond the limit of the lives of Langelier and his friends. Still the curve of human progress points to an eventual human solidarity, to the " rational organization of work and the establishment of the United States of the World. Universal peace will be realized some day, not because men will become better (it is not permitted to hope for it) but because a new order of things, a new science, new economic necessities will impose on them a state of peace, as formerly the very conditions of their existence placed them and maintained them in a state of war (2) ".

Here, again, in his constructive dream, Anatole France is the rational, analytical thinker. He believes in progress, in the evolution of society toward a state of peace and social justice but no zealous dogmatism blinds his calm glance ; no fierce enthusiasm disturbs his tranquil realization of the slow march of evolution. There is a certain strength in this clear, unmoved, fearless facing of reality. A certain grandeur, too. Looking steadily through these glasses of rational thought beyond the narrow horizon of emotional actualities, man is relieved of the petty, confining bonds of partisanship. Anatole France is still true to his freedom-loving, speculative nature.

It is here that Anatole France inserts his Utopia,

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 199-200.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 202.

founded on the principles already discussed. It is the year 2270. The close of the twentieth century beheld the end of war through the colonial insanity and commercial rivalry of the nations. Capitalism, source of much suffering and injustice, was the cause of the organization of the proletariat, which in turn produced the fall of capitalism. The last of the twentieth century is a period of insane competition of huge trusts, of bitter class war in which the proletariat is torn by an inner strife, blind and violent (1). Gradually are established better working conditions and the regular armies are replaced by militia imbued with socialistic ideas. No longer defended by cannon and guns, the monarchies fall one by one, all except that of England, which has already established a regime tolerable to the laborer; even that of Russia, in which absolutism has produced a pitiable state of imbecility, is overturned by the rise of the proletariat.

With the development of the telegraph and wireless, as well as of the use of aeroplanes, comes the suppression of frontiers after a three year period of wild nationalism. "The socialists could not have abolished capital and private property if these two forms of wealth had not already been about destroyed by the efforts of the proletariat and even more by the new developments of science and industry (2)."

It is not a cataclysm. And yet Anatole France refuses too easy a triumph. He inserts a period of a half century in which this socialistic union of the nations is nearly engulfed in disorder. Through a

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 276-277.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 282-283.

dictatorship of fourteen workers the Federation of European peoples is organized and the existence of France's Utopia is assured.

This Utopia which he proceeds to describe adds little that is new to his previous social criticism. Absorbed with the idea of the injustice produced by the institution of private property, he banishes it from his ideal state. Work, here, is raised to a position of honor. Not only must all work but all are rewarded alike for their labor, not with money but bonds representing hours of toil.

Taxation, too, is a constant source of injustice, according to France. Therefore taxes are here abolished. In their stead the State or " collectivity " retains from each bond a certain number of minutes for " the unproductive work, alimentary and metallurgic reserves, homes for the old and sick, etc. (1) ".

Study and research continue and receive compensation, for they are a form of production. Art still flourishes — poetry, drama, music, painting and sculpture. Education is very liberal and not standardized. " The people all know some things but they do not all know the same things and have learned nothing useless. They no longer waste their time by studying law and theology (2). " Here truly is the voice of France's animosity as well as of his love.

To Anatole France both law and theology represent systems created by man to hold his fellow man in subjection. The judicial system is a man-made, man-operated system and is not founded on the prin-

(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 292.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 303.

ciples of justice but to protect and avenge property rights.

The Church is a similar institution, teaching the poor resignation to the existing social system and promising them a future reward in heaven. The Church is a dictator of dogma, an agent of asceticism frowning on beauty, love and art. Consequently both theologians and judges are banished from France's Utopia. Justice is rendered by the citizens called in turn and the number of criminals has diminished with the number of crimes recognized as such. Religion still lives ; in France alone are to be found humanitarianism, positivism, Christianity and spiritism. The Pope is now Pius XXV, dyer by trade, via dell'Orso, Rome !

Anatole France was, perhaps, not so hostile to religion itself as to the autocratic administration of it in the Roman Catholic Church. He was not an anarchist against all law but rather he opposed the complexity and absurdity of legal codes and the arbitrary administration of them by one group of men.

Returning to another favorite idea of his, France causes urban society to disappear and with it the source of much crime. The population is now distributed into the country, of easy access by aeroplane. Of the family in this new society he says little. When men and women unite, neither takes any oath, for neither would care to be the object of a fidelity rendered an oath and not assured by physical and moral conventions.

But what of all this utopian reorganization ? Have anarchists disappeared ? No, they are still dangerous, found chiefly among the intellectuals (can you see France's smile ?) but they are less dangerous since

there is no repression whatsoever. Have equality and fraternity been realized ? Are men happy ?, No, for it is not in human nature to experience perfect content. Effort is necessary to produce happiness. And effort brings with it fatigue and suffering. As for equality, there is no such thing. The word France uses to describe this new social order is harmony. Life has now been made tolerable to all and the movement already begun will continue to progress in the future.

Such, then, is France's conception of a possible future society. Certainly there is little originality in it and nothing unusual. The fundamental principles of it he has long since developed and expressed, — the abolition of private property, and of special privilege, money, courts, marriage and Church centralization.

As though fearful of having committed himself too far, Anatole France, at the end, causes one of his speakers to doubt the advent of collectivism, at least as described. All faiths undergo great changes in the struggle for realization. Perhaps, after all, man is not the beginning nor the end of earthly life. After him new forms of life may develop, a higher race of nobler destiny (1). Thus even his picture of a possible triumph of socialism he closes by leaving open the door to further speculation. All his fences turn to gateways and he never leaves them closed or locked.

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(1) *Sur la Pierre blanche*, p. 318-319.

CHAPTER SIX

The Bitter Ironist and Post-War Calm

Toward Better Times and *On the White Stone* have shown us France, the idealist of socialistic faith and vision. Even here, in the full movement of his enthusiasm, he has preferred to reserve his judgment. He has drawn the plans for his Utopia, founded it on historical evolution, set certain conditions for its existence, and then withdrawn, so to speak, the " permit to build ". Perhaps, after all, evolution itself will change the course of events outlined. Perhaps, another race than man will solve the destiny of the future.

On the other hand, the world of reality provokes definite affirmation. Armenian massacres, Russian torture, fanatic injustice in France, the founding of universities for the proletariat, colonial exploitation, — all these are unmistakable facts. They arouse the sympathy of those who love justice and execrate unnecessary suffering and among their number is found Anatole France.

Now, however, in 1908, comes a reaction against his socialistic ardor. The influence of exterior events and of his own complex nature arouse in France a disillusioned bitterness. *Penguin Island*, *The Thirst of the Gods* and the *Revolt of the Angels* are its expression.

The war in 1914 comes to renew France's constant

protest against unnecessary suffering. He is forced by the censure to keep silent his longing for peace, his agony at the fearful struggle. The war finally over, France retires his pen to the service of his memories and returns to the calm and philosophic mellowness of Sylvestre Bonnard. The last volume to come from his pen is *Life in Bloom.* Other work is contemplated, even begun, but his eightieth birthday is both triumph and farewell. Already illness has clutched his free spirit and releases him only in death October 13th, 1924. Such is the last period of his work, a period first of bitter disillusionment and then of philosophic calm regained through memory's meditation.

Penguin Island, published in 1908, is a voltairian parody of French history. Unfortunately and unjustly for the author, it has been too often taken in this country as a fair and brilliant example of France's work. The ideas are a repetition in more bitter vein of those expressed in the Coignard books. France's irony is no longer tempered with pity. It is, at times, the savage expression of long festering ill humor.

Whence comes this resentment? Why has the tone of tranquil irony changed to such violence? The cause is probably complex like the character of France himself — a reaction against his socialistic affirmation, an exaltation of destructive analysis and above all a bitter disillusionment in the post Dreyfus events.

I believe that a clue can be found in the person of Bidault-Coquille, one of the characters of the book, concerned with the Dreyfus Affair, which is here disguised as the Affair of Pyrot and the thousand bales of hay. Bidault-Coquille is probably Anatole France himself.

" You thought yourself sublime ", he soliloquizes, " when all you had was candor and good will. On what did you pride yourself, Bidault-Coquille ? On having known among the first that Pyrot was innocent and Greatauk a rascal. But three-quarters of those who defended Greatauk against the attacks of the seven hundred pyrots knew it better than you. I fear that you have made trial of the great unintelligence of the conditions of the moral and intellectual development of peoples. You imagined that social injustices were like pearls strung on a string and that to pull one off caused the fall of the rest of the beads. " " You flattered yourself that you could establish justice at once in your country and in the universe. You were a good man, an honest spiritualist witout much experimental philosophy. But go back into your inner self and you will recognize that you, too, had your own clever idea and that in your ingenuousness you were not without ruse. You thought you were doing a good piece of moral business. You said to yourself : ' Here you are, once for all, just and courageous '. You shall be able ever afterward to rely on public esteem and the praise of historians. And now that you have lost your illusions, now that you know that it is a severe trial to right wrong and that it must be begun over and over again, endlessly, now you return to your asteroïds. You are right ; but return to them modestly, Bidault-Coquille ! (1) "

France's analysis remorselessly destroys the whole fabric of his good action. Was he " sublime " through his conviction of Dreyfus' innocence ? No, indeed ;

(1) *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 310-311.

even those who opposed him had that conviction. Was he sublime through his enthusiasm ? through his belief in the possibility of immediate justice ? Sublimely ignorant, perhaps, of experimental philosophy. And even that merit he grudgingly admits. Was not his inner self secretly seeking a moral camouflage under which he might go down to posterity ? A sadder, a wiser man he returns to his asteroids, in other words, to his speculation, convinced of the infinite slowness of human progress and satisfied to regain his disillusioned independence.

A full exposition of his disillusionment concerning socialism is found in the discussion held by the four men, Phoenix, Sapor, Larivée and Lapersonne. Phoenix represents the ideas of Roupart in the *Contemporary History*, the idealistic socialist, the only one with whom France retained real sympathy.

" A crime, " says Phoenix, " a judiciary crime, the most odious and cowardly of crimes has been committed... Do not say the victim does not belong to us ; that he is one of a caste which has been and always will be hostile to us. Our party is that of social justice ; there is no iniquity indifferent to it... Comrades, by a great intellectual, moral and material effort you will snatch Pyrot from torture ; and, in accomplishing this generous act, you will not be turning away from the emancipating and revolutionary task which you have assumed, for Pyrot has become the symbol of the oppressed and all social iniquities are joined ; by destroying one, we shake loose all the others (1). "

(1) *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 277.

Is this not what Bidault-Coquille has just been upbraiding himself for being so simple as to believe ? the loosened string of pearls ? Its repetition is proof of the author's earnest sincerity.

Three other socialists speak. Sapor, who is narrow and counsels supporting either side, asserts that all are their enemies, financiers, Jews and the military. The bourgeoisie is about to burst of its own infamy. " Let it burst and let us watch with jubilant disgust its last convulsions, regretting merely that it has so deeply corrupted the ground on which it was reared that we shall find only poisoned mud on which to found a new society (1). "

Lapersonne next takes the floor. His argument is that of the nihilist. Dreyfus, or rather Pyrot, is innocent. That is no reason to help him. On the contrary, *had he been guilty*, Lapersonne would have marched to his defense.

The fourth speaker of the socialists is Larivée, who urges intervention in the name of class strife. Set the army against the financiers, the government against the magistracy, the nobility and clergy against the Jews. Use violence and the weakening of the social structure by such a struggle will hasten the success of the proletariat by ten years (2).

Which one of the four comes into power ? the idealist ? the sulky Sapor, aloof from either side ? the anarchist ? or the representative of class strife ? It is Larivée, the man of violence and selfish partisanship. Once in power, however, he turns conser-

(1) *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 279.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 281.

vative and answers his fellow socialists as follows : " We no longer know you ; stop harping on your social justice. Social justice is the defense of wealth and property (1). "

This treachery is no new disappointment. Jérôme Coignard has already expressed it. " Opposition is a poor school for government and the clever politicians who advance by this means are very careful to govern by maxims quite the contrary of those they formerly professed. "

And yet, though the disillusionment is not new, still so keen had been France's idealistic enthusiasm that his relapse is particularly bitter. It is in that spirit, somewhat akin to the spirit of Renan's final philosophical nightmares that he pictures for society a despairing future. Capitalism is developed to its utmost, until, through the efforts of the anarchists, it is destroyed. Life rises again on the ruins only to develop again from the pastoral, rustic state to urban monstrosity. It is the " eternal return " of Nietsche. In reality no one would regret the violent end which France attributes to the inhuman, vicious, mechanical world as he pictures it in the hands of the capitalists. It is a wild gloomy exaggeration born of ill humor and disappointment. It is a sort of prophetic curse which France visits upon prosaic, selfish, violent humanity.

Such, then, is the end of his practical socialism. Its narrow partisanship never fitted his nature which clung to its own vague idealism. In reality he was never a true socialist. Traitor in word to his party, but traitor in deed only to himself.

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(1) *L'Ile des Pingouins*, p. 308.

The two volumes which follow *Penguin Island* seem rather detached from the general current of social criticism. Indirectly, however, they are related, the *Gods are athirst*, through its protest against blood-thirsty virtue and violence, the *Revolt of the Angels*, through its anticlericalism.

The Gods are athirst is a novel of the French Revolution to which France asserts his hostility. To him it is a period of violence and fanaticism, personified in Evariste Gamelin, an extreme Rousseauist who will force humanity to virtue at the point of the sword. Robespierre is another example of the Revolution, Robespierre, who will erect a new God, a new remunerative providence to keep men in the straight and narrow path. The jurors on the Tribunal of justice are " atrocious in their virtue or fear ". Their spirit is expressed in the words : " Let us drown ourselves in blood and save the country ! "

France's own point of view is presented by Brotteaux-des-Illettes. He illustrates not only the intellectual but the sensual France, now growing in intensity. Brotteaux is a *ci-devant*, now maker of toys, of which he says, " I did not give them thought, for I am a good and kindly God " (1). And yet it is he who protests against the ignorance and stupid tranquillity of men. Like Coignard, Brotteaux is sensitive to suffering. He receives in his attic the priest Longuemarre, pursued by the fanatic revolutionnists, and protests against Longuemarre's thanks. He has not performed this generous act for love of the priest, nor for humanity but through the selfish egoism

(1) *Les Dieux ont soif*, p. 12.

of man, which produces such generosity by causing him to see himself in others' misery. He has done it through pride to show of what an atheist is capable. Longuemarre, however, refuses to accept his " calumny " of himself.

Is not France, through Brotteaux, expressing his hatred of Pharisaïsm, of the human tendency to pride oneself on a good action ? Is this not an echo of the sincerity of Bidault-Coquille in *Penguin Island* ? When Brotteaux introduces another victim of the revolutionists' fanaticism into his garret, the young Athenaïs, he asks the priest if she may take refuge there for the night. Even Longuemarre, the priest, does not forbid Athenaïs to take refuge in the garret. " By what right should I oppose it ? That I believe myself offended by her presence ? Am I sure of being of greater worth than she ? " (1)

France would have us believe that it is best to do good and disclaim all virtue in doing it, for fear of pharisaic pride which leads to violence. Moreover we do not know all the selfishness there is at times in our very virtue. Here again is Coignard's self-including " gentle scorn ".

In the matter of religion, Brotteaux was an atheist and preferred — no new idea in France's work — old religions to new. Catholicism, says he, now requires only four or five heretic roasts in a hundred years !

He was a pessimist and found certain things in nature to admire, the celestial mechanism and physical love. Reason, too, he loved but not to the point of fanaticism. " Reason guides and en-

(1) *Les Dieux ont soif*, p. 219.

lightens us ; but when you make her a divinity, she will blind you and persuade you to crimes in her name." Such was his philosophy of tolerance. He accepted life cheerfully " while awaiting the approaching day when he should know neither fear nor desire. " From his pocket he takes his Lucretius, mainstay and comfort of his moments of gloom.

On the way to the guillotine, he displays his mocking irony, none too sufficient a mask for his inner anguish, which he attributes to his love of life and regret at leaving it. Sensual to the last, letting his glance fall on the lovely white throat of Athenaïs, beside him in the death cart, he regrets the light of day.

This sensual element is augmented in the *Revolt of the Angels*, published in 1914. It becomes almost a disease. Anatole France is here in revolt, not only against the evils of society but against the celestial empire. His conception of paradise is that of a " military organization founded on hierarchy and discipline. Passive obedience is there imposed as an absolute law. The angels form the army. Compare this place of sojourn with the Elysian fields which Virgil pictures. In the Elysian Fields all is liberty, reason, wisdom (liberté, raison, sagesse); the happy shades converse together in the woods of myrtle. In this heaven of Ialdabaoth, there is no civil population... It is a military barracks and field of manœuvres " (1).

The essential thought of the cruel tyrant, Ialdabaoth, carries us back to the early work of France and is found in *Thaïs*. To France the Christian God had always been the jealous, Jewish tyrant. In the *Revolt* this

(1) *La Révolte des Anges*, p. 293.

conception is the central thought of the author, now violent in his anticlericalism. One of the fallen angels expresses the dominating theme of the *Revolt*. " Our project is vast. It embraces both heaven and earth... First we shall cause the social revolution in France, in Europe, in the entire planet ; then we shall carry the war into the heavens and there establish a peace-loving democracy " (1).

France pictures the original heaven in which dwelt both Lucifer and the jealous demiurge Iaveh. He describes the battle between them and their followers, resulting in the exile of Lucifer. Lucifer, now Satan, realizes that one becomes God only through knowledge. " It is not blind courage... which will give us back our divine abode ; it is study and reflection " (2). Let us set about the study of nature in all her manifestations. " When she obeys us, we shall be the gods, but, even though she should conceal from us forever her mysteries, refuse us arms and keep the secret of the thunder bolt, still we should congratulate ourselves on coming to know suffering, since it reveals to us new sentiments more precious and more gentle than all those which are experienced in eternal bliss, since it inspires in us love and pity, unknown to heaven. "

Here again is France's favorite idea of the glory of suffering, source of virtue and beauty. Through it Satan, the fallen angel, becomes not a force of evil but rather the force which comforts and consoles man for the evils of human condition willed upon him by the conquering demiurge of heaven. The tables

(1) *La Révolte des Anges*, p. 185.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 200-201.

are turned. Iaveh, the god of heaven, is, by his omnipotence and inexorability, closed to a comprehension of the human soul, while Satan, now emancipated, first comes to understand it.

The fallen angels, attracted by human misery and genius, come to inhabit the earth and to teach man. France here gives a review of world history, lauding the Greeks for the development of wisdom and beauty. " Because there was there no priesthood, no dogma, no revelation, and because the Greeks never knew the jealous God, their country developed to a higher plane than had ever before been known (1). " In the time of the Augustan peace, the old god Iaveh, who had been incapable of making men love him, tried, by the trick of the doctrine of original sin and redemption, to prepare " the insolent conquest of the universe " (2).

" The insolent conquest of the universe " — what is it to France but the Church militant, forcing all to accept its dogma, and condemning as traitors to humanity those unwilling to accept its dictates ? Anatole France is convinced of the eternal opposition of religion to his humanistic ideals, — the liberty of thought, the right to enjoy life, the worship of beauty. His bitter hostility gives religion no credit whatsoever in the evolution of man.

Christ he pictures as the " apostle of sadness. He loved suffering and believed it good ; his wrath pursued all that is lovely, beautiful and joyous (3) ".

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(1) *La Révolte des Anges*, p. 211.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 216.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Immediately we see that France completely misunderstood the Son of God and confounded Him rather with certain of his representatives.

France's picture of the fanatic asceticism of Calvin and of the work of Luther is a dark one. Of Luther he wrote : " Jesus Christ is indebted to this monk for having postponed his shipwreck for ten centuries, perhaps (1). " Calvin he called " the long, dry doctor of Geneva, full of the spirit of the ancient Iaveh... a coldly furious maniac, a heretic burner of heretics, the fiercest enemy of the Graces (2) ".

The remainder of the book, with the exception of the magnificent Miltonian struggle of the angels at the conclusion, is of little interest in this study. France points out the folly of repression as a method to stamp out revolt and indicates the selfish interest of finance in provoking war. The conclusion of the book is of real importance, however, in an analysis of France's thought.

Satan, finding himself capable of the conquest of heaven, renounces the struggle. Victorious, he would merely become God. He prefers Hell, which has formed his genius, and earth, where he has done some good. He is satisfied with having dispossessed the old God of his earthly empire. He does not seek power and domination but untrammeled freedom. He must rather destroy the spirit of Iadabaoth which still predominates in men, the spirit which, through repression, engenders ignorance and fear.

This is the work to which Anatole France pledges

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(1) *La Révolte des Anges*, p. 239.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 239.

himself in the interest of an enlightened, happier humanity.

In 1914 the world was plunged into a colossal struggle. Believing in peace, long-standing enemy of war, its violence and stupidity, Anatole France beheld his country threatened. France he dearly loved ; for peace he had written and worked all his life. At the age of seventy he volunteered his services. It is a step in which his enemies insist on seeing a dishonoring contradiction. Michel Corday, in his *Last unpublished Pages of Anatole France*, explains in full the circumstances. Let the doubters who will persist in their doubt. Here is what M. Corday reports.

" It is known that, nourished on the Latin genius, he (France) admired all the work of the Romans, and particularly their conception of victorious peace. He liked to repeat the formula of this Roman peace which they had been able to impose on the whole world. " They wished their conquered enemies to become their friends. " In a declaration to the papers, the first month of the war, he simply transposed this quotation : " We shall not soil our victory with any crime... We shall proclaim that the French people admits to its friendship the conquered enemy. " Such were the universal delirium and blindness at the time that five hundred letters overwhelmed him with insults. To attest his civic faith and to give a concrete expression to his protestation he tried to enlist (1). "

During the war he wrote very little. He was under strict surveillance of the censure and only his close

(1) *Dernières pages inédites d'Anatole France*, p. 153-154.

friends knew what agony he suffered in the continuation of the awful struggle. *Sur la Voie glorieuse* (1916) and *Ce que disent nos Morts*, short essays written during the war, speak eloquently of France's love of country and of his sympathy for the suffering caused by the war.

Sur la Voie Glorieuse is a collection of articles all centered on the war and of different dates, beginning with December, 1914. He writes to the soldiers in the trenches, he singles out deeds of sacrifice, protests against the ruin of the Soissons Cathedral, and finally issues the call to arms for the last war. It is strange to hear him carried away in enthusiasm, an enthusiasm which after the war he did not consider altogether guiltless.

" Stand up for the last war ! To work, O Britain, queen of the seas, who lovest justice ; O holy Russia, giant of tender heart ; O lovely Italy whom I adore ; O Belgium, hero and martyr, O proud Serbia and thou, France, my beloved country..." (1) This illusion did not, and could not, last. But the Armistice finally came and the work of peace began. In 1919 in a speech to the Teachers'Congress at Tours he appeals again for education. " My friends, make hatred hated. "

Since the war, have appeared the volumes, *Little Peter* (1918) and *Life in Bloom* (1922), both volumes in which Anatole France abandons social criticism and returns to his early manner, the reminiscences of childhood and adolescence. *Little Peter* has a tone of mellow disillusionment akin to the spirit found in Sylvestre Bonnard. Telling of the experience of his

(1) *Sur la Voie glorieuse*, p. 90-91.

own life, he philosophizes with gentle irony and pessimism. Remembering Alphosine who embraced him while perfidiously sticking pins into his baby legs, he writes : " Long since I have forgiven little Alphosine for her perfidious cruelty and *even for her ugly hair.* (How like France !) More than that, I am grateful to her for having greatly advanced me at the age of two in the knowledge of human nature (1). "

Another curious incident is that of the childish treatise beginning, " What is God ", in which he has omitted the question mark. He refuses to place it there because he is not asking, he knows, what God is. " Since then I have greatly changed. I no longer refuse to put in question marks in all the places where it is customary. I should even be tempted to put some very big ones at the end of all I write, all I say and all I think (2). " Such is the spirit of the white-haired France.

These last volumes speak freely of himself, the dreams, the passions, the desires of Anatole, the boy and youth. He writes of his unceasing search for the unknown, of his love of reason, his tendency to dream. Old Paris was a liberal educator for him, showing him the dignity of the worker, the treasures of history and art. His passion for beauty he recognizes as of prime importance in his life. Between little Pierre and himself, however, he sees a broad gulf. It is the distance created by life and its disillusionment. "We no longer have in common, he and I, an atom of substance, nor of thought... It is sweet to me to live in memory the

(1) *Le Petit Pierre*, p. 22.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 37.

days he lived and I suffer, breathing the air of the times in which we now live (1). "

At his death France left unfinished a series of dialogues which he had projected. As for Renan, so for Anatole France, the dialogue was a favorite form of expression. The subjects in Michel Corday's collection include metaphysics, old age, the future, war, astronomy and modesty. These are but the random jottings which the affection of a friend and companion have placed in collected form with careful and well informed comments. There is little in the collection that is new. France repeats his old ideas concerning man's stupidity and the walls which confine his thought. He again protests against Christianity for its idea of expiation, for its burial of science and beauty and for the triumph of Saint Paul rather than of Christ.

Progress he admits only in the sense of an eternal succession of phenomena. Astronomy captivates his undying curiosity and he regrets to die before knowing whether other planets are inhabited. He had conceived the idea of a short story or novel on Napoleon but illness and death ended his work with the pleasant echo of his early work, the evocation of his boyhood. It is quite fitting that the creator of Jeanne Alexandre and Pierre and Suzanne should lay down his pen with them.

What is, now, the basis of Anatole France's skepticism ? In the first place, by nature, he is unable to accept what most men take for granted. Like Montaigne he prefers to suspend his judgment and enjoy his freedom, denying no philosophy but accep-

(1) *Le Petit Pierre*, p. 317.

ting none. His intense intellectual curiosity, his keenness of analysis sway him to the negative side, to doubt. Science is as yet quite incapable of solving the riddle of the universe. Morality is founded on custom and is in a state of constant evolution. Religion again brings in an absolute, an exterior authority and the supernatural, none of which he can accept. Christianity to Anatole France is the expression of faith in a jealous, cruel, oppressing God, who hates freedom of thought and teaches to scorn beauty and nature. France is rather the man of the Renaissance, rich in the spirit of humanism, a pagan Greek worshipping beauty.

In the second place, like Renan, he enjoys entering into the understanding of conflicting thoughts and ideas. Like him, too, the aristocrat of the intellect, he is fond of speculation and glories in the superiority of thought over action. Action is sudden, positive, violent. Thought is calm, free, capable of change and shading, and above all tolerant. There is so much in life that is relative, contradictory, or shrouded in mystery beyond the ken of man that it is difficult to affirm any one truth.

Truth to Anatole France is a great white wheel made up of all separate and conflicting truths. For him there is no absolute, no one aspect of truth exclusive of all others. He would welcome them all, analyze them all, with Renan's indulgent hospitality. Not only this; he would also resent and struggle against the acceptance of any one exclusive truth or authority. Hence his emphasis on tolerance, the skeptic's virtue. Hence his opposition to the Church and his appeal for enlightenment of the people through education.

Anatole France believed that life should be made livable for all men here and now. Religion's promissory note on Paradise for the suffering and poor was a trick of the wealthy and powerful. A survey of human weakness, of the forces of prejudice and ignorance and the injustice of human institutions aroused in France a growing resentment against the useless, unnecessary suffering of the people.

When, in the Dreyfus Affair, human justice, poor though it was, received, so to speak, its death blow, when tolerance and freedom, the essence of his philosophy, were trampeled upon, then he was torn for a time from his intellectual calm. The great reality of human life which he never denied, human suffering, came to claim his active sympathy, for the cause of suffering humanity always called forth a word of defense from Anatole France.

Whether he was always right or even consistent in his attitude and assertions is not a matter to be determined here. What remains true forever is his appeal for tolerance, for clear thinking, for freedom of growth, his defense and worship of beauty. His death brought a feeling of great loss to citizens of the world. Testimonials from other nations as well as from his own prove the influence of his writing.

Some hail him as the last of the classic age, master of humanistic culture. Some admire him as critic or social satirist. Some name him dilettante, nihilist, hedonist, epicurean and even idealist. One speaks of certain of his works as a bath of hatred (1). Another says that, were he fleeing before a second deluge,

(1) Giraud, *Les Maîtres de l'heure*, vol. II, p. 273.

he would clasp to himself the precious volume of *The Revolt of the Angels* (1).

Many regret the deepening and most unpleasant sensuality of his later books, but all respect his fearless intelligence and militant sympathy. To both, Maxim Gorki bears eloquent testimony. " Living in the grimy hell, so artfully, so perfectly organized by the leading classes of Europe, Anatole France, who had the outward appearance of a satyr and the great soul of an ancient philosopher, discerned and scented everything " evil " with a wonderful clear-sightedness. His large nose inhaled all the fetid odors of hell, however subtle they might be, and — like Socrates — France had both the inclination and the ability to discover evil in matters which current opinion acknowledged as good (2). "

Complex as is his personality, varied as is his work, it will not be an easy task to judge him fairly and completely. The future alone can pronounce with any degree of conviction.

" A skeptic ! But all the masters of French thought have been skeptics... Our greatest skeptics have sometimes been the most affirmative and courageous of men. "

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(1) Thibaudet, J. N. R. F. June, vol. I, 1923, p. 740.
(2) Maxim Gorki, *The Saturday Review*, vol. II, n° 41, p. 765.

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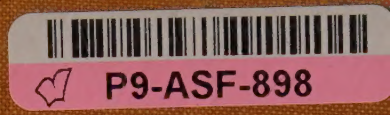
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